



# PAVING the WAY

by SIMPSON  
NEWLAND



**PAVING THE WAY**



THE LIBRARY  
OF  
THE UNIVERSITY  
OF CALIFORNIA  
LOS ANGELES



Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2008 with funding from  
Microsoft Corporation



Faithfully yours  
S. Newland

# PAVING THE WAY

## A ROMANCE OF THE AUSTRALIAN BUSH

BY  
SIMPSON NEWLAND

WITH FIFTY ILLUSTRATIONS



LONDON  
GAY AND HANCOCK, LTD.  
1913

*All rights reserved*



PT.  
5103  
N447

## P R E F A C E

As, in a work on Australian pioneer life such as this purports to be, it might be difficult to present bare facts in an acceptable form to the general public, my object has been to blend truth and fiction in a connected narrative. That it partakes largely of a romance is certain. It could not be otherwise where the incidents, though so romantic, are mainly authentic ; for these lives have been lived and these deaths have been died. It is not alone on the familiar ground of the Old World that heroic deeds have been performed or suffering nobly endured.

To particularise too closely would not add interest to the story for the public, though it might in the opinion of those acquainted with many of the occurrences alluded to or more or less related. I have endeavoured to wound as few susceptibilities and tread on as few toes as possible ; the time has not yet arrived in the life of Australia when the historian or novelist can write with an untrammelled pen.

SIMPSON NEWLAND.

*September 1893.*

TO MY MOTHER  
WHOSE MEMORY HAS BEEN A LIFELONG INSPIRATION

## INTRODUCTION TO ILLUSTRATED EDITION

SINCE this book was first issued there has been a fuller recognition of the ethnological importance of collecting from the pioneers of Australia—now fast passing away—all possible information of the customs, habits, and traditions of the aborigines. The publication of another edition seems a fitting opportunity for assisting this object by reviewing that part of the work in which individuals of the aboriginal race play their part. This is the more necessary as 'The Doom of the Mullas' and 'A True Tale of the Wompangees' appearing in the pages of a romance might well be ascribed to the imagination of the author. As memory goes back, the actors appear before me from their mouldering graves, picturesque, interesting figures in a strange wild land. Nearly all the coloured characters portrayed were drawn from life. The originals were members of some of the finest tribes of all Australia. The tribes of the Tatiara, the Murray, and Darling rivers are peculiarly interesting because they, perhaps, of all their race made the most determined resistance to the European aggressor. This they were probably enabled to do as the deadly rifle and revolver of the white man were not then in use. The Encounter Bay tribe had some extraordinary customs. Some of their dead, if not all, were placed for a time on a rough platform up spreading trees; others were first put over a slow fire, as once witnessed by the author. The process of 'roasting' was a ghastly one. The body was placed on a sort of rude gridiron in a sitting position over a slow fire of embers, round which sat some old crones engaged in extinguishing the flames that occasionally shot up, caused by the drip from the corpse, for a moment lighting the weird night scene. Later what was left of the bodies was secretly buried in carefully concealed graves.

The weapons of these blacks were very fine; really beautifully made, long, effective spears, barbed with fish bones. The shields, unlike those of nearly all other tribes, were of thick gum bark cut and shaped on the tree, and were as large as those of ancient days. There were many other weapons, but no true boomerangs or stone tomahawks. The

Murray and Darling blacks had well-defined and often well-kept burial-grounds with stones and gypsum balls placed round and on the graves. The Parkingees, a tribe on the Upper Darling River, were expert hunters. Water-fowl they caught in nets suspended on a cord stretched across streams, or partially so, on two tall poles. One end of the cord was tied to a peg thrust lightly into the ground at one side of the water. A black fellow crouched near, under a bush, and as the birds came flying down or up, just as they approached the net, he flung a piece of bark prepared for the purpose in the air to imitate the swoop of the hawk, at the same time uttering a shrill whistle like the cry of that bird. The frightened ducks dived down in their impetus into the net, the peg drew, the net fell enveloping the ducks, and in a few moments the black fellow wrung their necks and placed the net in position again. Birds such as pigeons were obtained in the same way by stretching a net across a glade in the evening, when they were flying to water. The Parkingees were also very successful in spearing fish, not from above the water, but from below. Armed with light iron-rod spears—before the white man supplied that material wood served the purpose—the aboriginals chose the deepest water-holes of the Darling, when the river was comparatively low and clear, and after anointing their bodies to keep out the cold entered the water, swam out a little way, and then went down feet foremost and hands up. The next thing to appear would be a fish on the point of a spear, followed by a grinning black visage. The fish would be flung on the bank and the same process repeated, usually with much laughter and fun, and in my experience always with success. I am not aware that this mode of 'fishing' is now, or has ever been, practised in any other part of the world. Of course a good swimmer is required, but swimming is an art in which the aboriginal of the great rivers excels.

The 'making a youth into a man' was crude. It consisted simply of knocking out a front tooth with the aid of a boomerang and a waddie. The edge of the boomerang was placed on the tooth and hammered by the waddie until the tooth was extracted. After this ceremony the neophyte was requested to disappear from sight for a number of duly appointed days.

The black fellows' weapons were good, the boomerang in particular. I fortunately possessed one that, well thrown, would return to the thrower and as he stepped aside pass him and return again, in all, six times. The stone tomahawk was good of its kind, and, as numerous



trees showed, had been much used in cutting out opossums. The canoes were of bark stripped from the trunks of gum trees and were often large enough to carry a family. If nature did not provide the required shape, a fire was kindled in the hollow until the bark was hot and flexible, then it was withdrawn, and the required form attained by aboriginal experts using weights and props to retain the bark in the necessary position till cold and stiff. That was the only system of boat-building known to the aborigines of the Darling before the advent of the European, and it served their purpose extremely well. The Parkingees, and I believe other tribes of the Darling, performed no rites to prevent increase, such rites presumably were practised for that purpose in indifferently watered country, where the conditions of life were harder, but the aborigines of the Darling did destroy at birth all malformed children and possibly others not born according to their ethics or laws.

It has been said that the Australian aborigine has no traditions. This statement is certainly not to be accepted without reservation. There may not be many traditions of very great importance or very well authenticated. It is well known by all those best acquainted with this singular people that they will tell the seeker after information anything they think he wishes to hear; hence the necessity of great caution in accepting even the best told, the most plausible tale. Though well aware from a long experience of this peculiarity, I am still absolutely certain of the Parkinge tribe's belief in the former existence of the Mullas and their slaughter by their own people, who ever afterwards lived in fear of the revengeful spirits of the extinct tribe. The tale was told in this wise. In the early days of the settlement of the Upper Darling the Parkinge tribe was a fairly numerous one. About a hundred men, women, and children were on the one station, mostly employed and very useful, generally as shepherds and stock riders. I soon found great reluctance among all of them to camp at night near a part of the Mount McPherson Range. They alleged that the rocks and small caves there were the home of the spirits of the Mullas, and that to sleep near was to be smitten with sickness, followed by death. Whenever there was sickness in the main camp on the river, even at the station, some old man would tell me that he had heard the yell of a Mulla in the night. He would say 'the white man could not hear, but the black man could.' As time went on their dread seemed to diminish, and I one night camped near the dreaded spot with two

stock riders, one a middle-aged man of great influence with his people. A good fire was kept, which nothing would induce either of them to leave. The hobbled horses made a bolt, and I had to fetch them back myself. The older native told me, in answer to questions, that the Mullas once owned that part of the country. They were 'toolacca' (very bad). They were very short in stature, with long arms, the men having a horny, tomahawk-shaped projection on their elbows, with which they fought, dealing heavy blows. The old black told me much more of their prowess and evil deeds in carrying off women and children. Ultimately the Parkingees destroyed them, and ever since had been haunted by their spirits. Frequently after this I was told that a sick black fellow would die, having been struck with a mortal disease by the haunting Mullas, and he generally did die, it may be because he was told he must.

Some years later, when out in the back country near the haunted hill with a number of natives, we found at the top of a soft sand-hill a large deep hole under a big dead bush, evidently scooped out by the wind. At the bottom were many conical-shaped bowls of various sizes made of a kind of gypsum, the same material used by the lubras to plaster their heads with as a sign of mourning. These bowls were obviously formed to fit on the heads of adults, youths, and children. I tried them on, but few were large enough to go on my head. Most of them were broken, but about a dozen remained entire, and probably there were others still covered with sand. An old man present assured me that these gypsum head-covers were made by the Mullas at a failing spring, when surrounded by their Parkingee foes, and perishing from hunger and thirst, to protect their heads from the burning heat. At a salt lake some miles away, he said, there still lay the remains of a Mulla. He described the spot so plainly that my particular black boy told me he could find it, and after the discovery already made I hoped for success, but a diligent search ended in failure. I had no vehicle in which to remove the other relics, and to carry them so far on horseback was impossible, nor did it seem necessary, as I had no suspicion they would be disturbed. Several weeks elapsed before an opportunity served to visit the place, better prepared to take them away. To my astonishment and disappointment not one, or any fragment of one, remained, nor did I ever learn what became of them, but doubtless the natives from superstitious motives disposed of them, though they vehemently denied having done so.

## INTRODUCTION TO ILLUSTRATED EDITION xi

The main incidents of 'A True Tale of the Wompangees' were related to me by Miola, a character occupying a prominent place in this book, who could speak English fluently and was immeasurably the most intelligent aboriginal I have ever known. The Parkingee tribe was divided into two classes, the Keelparas and the Muckwaras, evidently with the object of avoiding the evil of too close consanguinity. This division appears to have existed from remote ages, and a strict law or regulation was still in force forbidding the union of Keelpara with Keelpara or Muckwara with Muckwara. The penalty for any evasion of it was death, sure and prompt; certainly for the male offender, however devoted the couple might be to each other. A Keelpara must marry a Muckwara. Another custom of nearly equal stringency was that if one of two brothers died, the survivor must take to wife his widow to—in Scriptural phrase—'raise up seed to his defunct brother.' The loving pair in Miola's tale were both of one class and so had infringed the sacred canons of the stern, implacable law regulating conjugal unions. The only hope was flight; but the chance of safety was remote where pursuit by unrelenting human bloodhounds was certain.

About two years after I had heard Miola's tale another vengeful chase from a near camp of aborigines occurred within my own knowledge. A black fellow struck a lubra, a mere girl, a savage blow and killed her. Then he fled. The nearest of kin, a youth badly lame from a crooked leg, who had the right, according to tribal law, to strike the first blow, and two others, were chosen to follow and kill. It seemed to me that with a crippled man as leader the pursuit must necessarily be slow and long. Yet the news soon came that the murdered girl had been duly avenged.

The other portions of the book require little comment. Though tinged with romance, they could more correctly be described as a history of the early days of a large portion of Australia. Very many of the incidents depicted are true, and most of the characters are drawn from life. I think, too, I may fairly claim that the country and the localities where the scenes are laid are faithfully and truly delineated.

In preparing this edition of *Paving the Way* for the press, I have to thank many sympathetic friends for their welcome help in obtaining the necessary material for the illustrations. From my friend, the Hon. Sir Langdon Bonython, C.M.G., I gratefully acknowledge having received much kindly advice and assistance. Many years ago I discussed with him my bush experiences, and it was he who urged me to

embody them in a book. To K. L. (Mrs. H. A. Moore) I am deeply indebted for a number of spirited drawings in black and white, used in the first illustrated edition ; some of which are reproduced in the present issue. I also tender my hearty thanks to the South Australian Government Photographic Department, the Tourist Bureau, and the Marine Board, for placing at my disposal a large number of excellent photographs.

SIMPSON NEWLAND.

ADELAIDE, *June* 1913.

# CONTENTS

## PART I

### ON THE COAST

CHAP.	PAGE
I. THE SHIPWRECK . . . . .	I
II. ILL GOT—ILL GONE . . . . .	10
III. THE MASSACRE . . . . .	18
IV. A RACE FOR LIFE . . . . .	28
V. THE WHALING STATION . . . . .	35
VI. THE HEADMAN'S DAUGHTER . . . . .	41
VII. PET TO THE RESCUE . . . . .	51
VIII. A WHALE HUNT . . . . .	57
IX. OVERLANDING . . . . .	65
X. A BRUSH WITH THE BLACKS . . . . .	74
XI. NATIVE OBSEQUIES . . . . .	86
XII. AUNT ARABELLA ARRIVES . . . . .	99
XIII. BRITISH JUSTICE . . . . .	106
XIV. A HOMERIC COMBAT . . . . .	117
XV. PET'S TROUBLES BEGIN . . . . .	125
XVI. THE STAR . . . . .	137
XVII. THE NOBLE SAVAGE OBTAINS SOME MUTTON . . . . .	142
XVIII. A LONG RIDE . . . . .	151
XIX. CIVILISING THE BLACKS . . . . .	160
XX. ROLAND MISSES HIS CHANCE . . . . .	171
XXI. GATHERING CLOUDS . . . . .	176
XXII. DARKIE'S FLIGHT . . . . .	185
XXIII. A DEED OF DERRING-DO . . . . .	195
XXIV. IN HIDING . . . . .	201
XXV. THE PURSUERS BAFFLED . . . . .	208
XXVI. KANGAROO ISLAND . . . . .	216

CHAP.	PAGE
XXVII. FACILIS DESCENSUS AVERNI . . . . .	223
XXVIII. AUNT ARABELLA PLAYS HER TRUMP CARD . . . . .	227
XXIX. LOVE AND PRIDE . . . . .	235
XXX. THE REVEREND JEREMIAH UTTERS A WORD IN SEASON . . . . .	241
XXXI. BLIGHTED LOVE . . . . .	248
XXXII. ROLAND LOVES AND RIDES AWAY . . . . .	256
XXXIII. A BUSH MYSTERY . . . . .	264
XXXIV. A FRUITLESS SEARCH . . . . .	271
XXXV. DARK SUSPICIONS . . . . .	277
XXXVI. VENUS VICTRIX . . . . .	285
XXXVII. BAULKED . . . . .	292
XXXVIII. ATÉ AT WORK AGAIN . . . . .	299
XXXIX. ROLAND SURPRISES HIS AUNT . . . . .	306
XL. FRESH FIELDS AND PASTURES NEW . . . . .	314
XLI. THE HEADMAN SAILS INTO THE UNKNOWN SEA . . . . .	321

## PART II

## IN THE INTERIOR

I. ON THE DARLING . . . . .	331
II. ON THE QUEENSLAND BORDER . . . . .	338
III. THE NEW COOK . . . . .	344
IV. A MURDEROUS OUTRAGE . . . . .	350
V. ROLAND'S RESPONSIBILITIES INCREASE . . . . .	358
VI. A DROUGHT AND ITS CONSEQUENCES . . . . .	367
VII. BUSHRANGERS AT WORK . . . . .	377
VIII. 'BAIL UP!' . . . . .	386
IX. MIOLA AND HER MASTER . . . . .	395
X. THE LAST OF THE PARKINGEES . . . . .	403
XI. THE DOOM OF THE MULLAS . . . . .	411
XII. ERÓS THE ALL-SUBDUER . . . . .	419
XIII. ON BOARD THE 'PLOVER' . . . . .	427
XIV. AN ACCIDENT AND ITS RESULTS . . . . .	435
XV. ROLAND LOSES A FRIEND . . . . .	443
XVI. THE DEATH OF CAPTAIN THUNDERBOLT . . . . .	452

# CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
XVII. THE BREAK-UP OF THE GANG . . . . .	460
XVIII. GHOSTS . . . . .	468
XIX. DARKIE TELLS HIS STORY . . . . .	479
XX. THE PRIZE IS WON AT LAST . . . . .	488
XXI. THE MYSTERIOUS LOCKET . . . . .	494
XXII. THE JEW'S HOARD . . . . .	502
XXIII. AFTER LONG YEARS . . . . .	508
XXIV. THE BUSH REVEALS ITS SECRET . . . . .	511
XXV. NEMESIS . . . . .	517
XXVI. THE DEATH OF THE STAR . . . . .	523

# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

THE BLUFF, EAST VIEW, . . . . .	<i>At page</i> 16
CAPE COUEDIE, KANGAROO ISLAND, . . . . .	„ 16
TOWN OF VICTOR HARBOUR—FROM THE EAST, . . . . .	„ 32
ENCOUNTER BAY—FROM THE WEST, . . . . .	„ 32
ENTERING THE MURRAY MOUTH, . . . . .	„ 48
NEWLANDS HEAD AND PORPOISE HEAD BEYOND, . . . . .	„ 64
SITE OF THE OLD WHALING STATION, . . . . .	„ 64
THE WHALING COVE, . . . . .	„ 80
ROASTING ONE-ARMED CHARLEY, . . . . .	„ 96
A HOMERIC COMBAT, . . . . .	„ 112
PETREL WATCHING THE WHALE-HUNT, . . . . .	„ 128
AUSTRALIAN RIVER NAVIGATION, . . . . .	„ 144
MURRUMBIDGEE RIVER—STEAMER AND BARGE, . . . . .	„ 144
VIEW OF ANA BRANCH OF DARLING RIVER, . . . . .	„ 160
JUNCTION OF RUFUS AND MURRAY, . . . . .	„ 160
MURRAY RIVER (two views), . . . . .	„ 176
N.W. BEND CLIFFS, RIVER MURRAY (two views), . . . . .	„ 192
PETREL BAY, . . . . .	„ 208

WEST ISLAND, ENCOUNTER BAY, . . . . .	<i>At page</i> 208
SECOND VALLEY, RAPID BAY, . . . . .	„ 224
SETTLER'S HUT, KANGAROO ISLAND, . . . . .	„ 224
AUSTRALIAN STOCKMAN, . . . . .	„ 240
MIDDLETON ROCKS AND MURRAY BEACH, . . . . .	„ 256
MIDDLETON ROCKS AND BREAKERS, . . . . .	„ 256
CURRENCY CREEK, . . . . .	„ 272
THE GAP, . . . . .	„ 272
SNUG COVE, . . . . .	„ 288
HINDMARSH RIVER, VICTOR HARBOUR, . . . . .	„ 304
MOUTH OF INMAN RIVER. SEAL ROCK IN THE DISTANCE,	„ 304
THE NOB, PORT ELLIOT, . . . . .	„ 320
PORT ELLIOT, . . . . .	„ 320
CARRIERS' TEAM OF THE FAR BUSH, . . . . .	„ 336
CARRIERS' TEAM OF BACK COUNTRY, . . . . .	„ 336
DARLING RIVER ABORIGINAL, . . . . .	„ 352
DEVIL'S ELBOW, RIVER MURRAY, . . . . .	„ 368
INTERIOR MAIL COACH, . . . . .	„ 368
MOOLAHALLA, RIVER DARLING, . . . . .	„ 384
MOB OF TRAVELLING CATTLE FROM THE INTERIOR, .	„ 400
THE CHIEF AND HIS DEAD KINSMAN, . . . . .	„ 416
AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL USING FIRE-DRILL, . . .	„ 432
AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL THROWING BOOMERANG, .	„ 432
SETTLER'S CAMP, . . . . .	„ 448
JUNCTION OF THE MURRAY AND DARLING, . . . .	„ 464
MURRUMBIDGEE, . . . . .	„ 464
BOURKE, RIVER DARLING, . . . . .	„ 480
GOOLWA, RIVER MURRAY, . . . . .	„ 496
WENTWORTH, DARLING JUNCTION, . . . . .	„ 496
MURRAY RIVER, . . . . .	„ 512



# PART I

## ON THE COAST

### CHAPTER I

#### THE SHIPWRECK

ON one of the latter days of November 183-, as night fell, a brig might have been seen approaching the western point of Kangaroo Island, which is now named Cape Borda, and upon which stands one of the South Australian Government light-houses. The southern coast of the island is bold, rock-bound, and inaccessible, and long, heavy ocean-rollers break unceasingly upon it. Lying across the mouth of St. Vincent Gulf, like a recumbent lion guarding the path to its lair, the island itself seems the grim guardian of the calmer waters within. The day had been hot and sultry, and the evening set in dark and threatening; black storm-clouds rose piled one upon another to the north-west, and among them the forked lightning already began to play in quick flashes. The wind had sunk to an occasional puff, which scarcely ruffled the surface of the sullen sea; and the sails of the vessel flapped loudly as she swung from side to side when the long rollers passed under her.

According to present ideas of naval architecture she was a clumsily built craft, broad in the beam and bluff in the bows, evidently as slow as she was strong. Immediately below her bowsprit was the roughly carved figure of a woman, to the full as buxom as the ship herself. On one side of this figure was the name *Mary*, on the other 'London.' Had any one stepped on deck, too, he would soon have gathered further

particulars respecting her voyage and passengers. The cry of 'Land, ho!' had brought her captain quickly up from below, followed by all hands. He was a man about six feet high, with a strong, resolute face, lighted up by fearless grey eyes. Earnestly he scanned through his glass the iron-bound coast, and then, as he noticed the gathering storm-clouds, an anxious look passed over his face.

'Take in sail and make all snug aloft,' said he to the mate, who stood near, 'there's heavy weather to the nor'-west, and we must keep off the land. I can see it's not quite a feather-bed for any one to tumble into.'

A handsome, bright-faced boy about sixteen years of age, with light brown hair and dark blue eyes, overheard the words.

'Is that Port Jackson Heads, captain, that you have so often told me to look out for?' he asked, with a gay laugh that showed he was a privileged person.

'No, my boy, I wish it were,' replied the captain; 'we've got a bit farther to go before we get there; but a storm is coming up that will push us along at our best pace. Now, tell your mother to go below, for she is not strong enough to stand a wetting, and it will rain in torrents presently.'

The boy had early in the voyage gained the master's favour by his frank, fearless manner, and each day had drawn them closer together. His father, an English gentleman named Roger Grantley, had come to the owners of the *Mary* with the highest recommendations, and taken the best quarters in the ship for himself and family, consisting of his wife, his son, and a servant maid, a pleasant, ruddy-faced girl of nineteen, Peggy Puce by name. Roger Grantley was a scion of an old Cumbrian family, once wealthy and powerful. The head of the house, at the time of the Derwentwater rebellion, had joined the ill-fated peer who led it, and taken a prominent part in the struggle. After fighting bravely for 'the king over the water,' he lost his head on the scaffold, and his estates were confiscated.

Such is a brief summary of the decline of the race. At

first the ruin seemed irretrievable, but later, by the interest of influential connections by marriage and other friends who had supported the winning side, the baronetcy and the greater part of the estates had been restored to the descendants of the beheaded rebel. The property, however, required nursing, if the Grantleys of Grantley Hall were ever to hold their heads high again, and each succeeding head of the house had devoted his energies to the restoration of its former glories. Roger's elder brother, Sir Archibald, was no exception to this rule. He considered it much more important to build up the wealth and position of the family than to supply the requirements of members of it who were not necessary to its dignity or continued existence. For a time Roger had taken matters philosophically, and apparently meant to allow the owner of the estate the privilege of supporting him. He soon, however, discovered his mistake, as the baronet peremptorily declined this honour. This occurred at about the time he arrived at what are called 'years of discretion'—though it may be doubted if Roger ever reached that stage—and realised that he was the youngest of three sons. It then began to dawn upon him that 'something must be done.' So he married a reputed heiress, of a family nearly as proud as his own, though somewhat looked down upon by the leading magnates of that exclusive county, and by so doing annoyed Sir Archibald, who disliked the lady, and despised the pretensions of her people. For a while, however, all went fairly well. She bore him one son—the boy who was on board the brig—and two daughters. Meanwhile the baronet married, with the highly practical purpose of providing himself with an heir. In due time he begat a son, who was followed a few years later by a little girl. The second brother, not to be outdone, also took to himself a wife, who died in giving birth to twins, both boys. The successive advent of these heirs-male appeared effectually to extinguish all hope of Roger's son inheriting the great Grantley estates. Then another disaster followed. The income settled upon his wife on the security of her father's estate could no longer be paid in consequence of a claim to

the property having been set up. The Roger Grantleys now found themselves reduced to the most meagre income. Finding that nothing was to be expected from the generosity of relatives, and rendered more proudly sensitive than ever by these reverses, they determined to seek better fortune in a distant land, and ultimately decided to go to New South Wales and take up grants of land, then offered by the Government to new settlers. The daughters were left in charge of a spinster aunt on the father's side to finish their education. Collecting the few thousand pounds still left, Mr. Grantley took passage in the *Mary*. A bitterly disappointed, broken man, accustomed to all the luxuries and refinements of life, he deeply felt the discomforts of the small vessel, and what he was pleased to call 'his exile.' Hypochondriacal by nature, the monotony of the voyage told so severely upon him, that from the first day he languished, and at the end of three months his body was committed to the deep.

Mentally, Mrs. Grantley much resembled her husband. Never very strong in health, the privations inseparable from the protracted voyages of the sailing ships of that period impaired her spirit and strength. Like him, pride of family was her most striking characteristic, and when he died she felt isolated and alone, among people she considered vastly her inferiors. She, however, had made a sort of friend and confidant of the captain, even in this excusing herself under the unspoken plea that it was for the sake of her son. Poor woman, the traditions of the past had taught her to believe that she was almost of superior clay to the ordinary mortals around her, an idea which her training and education had served only to foster.

Peggy Puce did all she could for her mistress, but they had now been five months on the sea, and the luxuries and comforts brought with them had long been exhausted. No wonder the unhappy lady pined away day by day. The only other woman on board was a Mrs. Cantling, the wife of a young fellow going out to join some friends in or near Sydney, who were doing well, and anxious to gather some kinsfolk around

them to share their good fortune and possibly relieve their solitude. The rest of the passengers were mostly men in the prime of life, strong stalwart countrymen, who looked fit to cope with the difficulties and dangers incidental to a new colony. There was one of quite another type, a short, spare man, whose features proclaimed his Jewish origin. With restless movements and furtive glances, he glided along the deck addressing no one. His fellow-passengers had early come to the conclusion that his occupation had been that of a money-lender not satisfied with less than cent. per cent. As a matter of fact, he had also been a receiver of stolen goods, or in thieves' parlance 'a fence,' in a low part of London. Finding things becoming too hot to be pleasant or safe, he decided to transfer himself and the proceeds of a not unsuccessful career to Port Jackson, where he confidently anticipated meeting many old acquaintances and being able to open up a lucrative business.

Including crew and passengers, the *Mary* carried some fifty souls, many of them weary of the long voyage and eager to see the land of their adoption. Old at starting, her timbers were considerably strained by the rough weather they had met with on the voyage, and this caused the master to view with some trepidation the tempestuous weather now threatening. Brave and skilful sailor as he was, his experience told him that their position was fraught with peril. A dangerous coast to leeward with no safe harbour for many miles, an unseaworthy ship carrying fifty human beings dependent upon him for safety, and a furious hurricane about to burst upon them; such was the situation he had to face.

The boy had gone below with his mother, and most of the other passengers had followed his example, leaving the sailors to combat the advancing storm as best they could. In a few minutes more it came: a blinding flash of lightning, accompanied rather than followed by an awful crash of thunder, and a tempest of wind and rain. Thrown over on her side, it seemed as if the vessel would never right again; then, slowly, denuded of all her upper gear, with masts broken off a few

feet from the deck and all the boats gone, she recovered and drove on, a helpless wreck. With the instinct of a true sailor, the captain had held on to the wheel, and now, with the assistance of a stalwart seaman, endeavoured to keep her before the wind. The mate and half the men had gone overboard at the first shock; the others crept back from the shattered bulwarks, bruised and half-drowned, and clung to the stumps of the masts for support against the seas that swept the deck. The blackness of darkness enveloped them in a mantle no sight could penetrate; but, though helpless and continually drenched by the waves breaking over the ship, the brave men stuck to their posts, ever hoping that an abatement of the storm would allow them to gain some control over the wreck. When morning broke, its greatest violence seemed over, and the master ventured below. He then found his worst fears verified; the strained timbers had parted, and there were already several feet of water in the hold. From the nature of the cargo he did not anticipate the brig would sink, yet it was evident that the passengers would be driven on deck. Shelterless, with the tempest still raging, what a prospect for the women and the boy! Warning them all that in the course of a few hours, at most, they must leave their present retreat, he urged them to eat a good meal of whatever was to be had, and provide themselves with all the warm clothing available.

Though the land could not be seen, the ship was drifting parallel with the coast and gradually settling down in the water, the seas still frequently sweeping over her. Before midday, the whole of the survivors were collected round the stumps of the shattered masts, to which the weaker were lashed securely to prevent their being washed away. Constantly soaked, as they were, by the blinding spray on the nearly unprotected deck of the now utterly helpless wreck, the situation appeared as hopeless as it well could be.

Night again set in upon the miserable people, collected in a shivering group on the highest part of the deck, driving they knew not whither. Suddenly, for a moment only, just before

nightfall, the thick storm-clouds parted, revealing, to the west, a noble headland with a flag floating from its summit ; then the rift closed and it was lost. It caught the watchful eye of the captain, and a gleam of hope lighted up his face.

‘Land, and inhabited!’ he exclaimed, and each wretch there felt less desolate when he heard that other human beings were near. Then the blackness of night and the tempest enveloped them, as they drifted, all unwittingly, past the last chance of succour.

‘Friends,’ said the master, ‘let all who may reach land remember that at this hour we passed a high bluff to the westward, and on it a flag was plainly flying. Probably there is a settlement near, and by following the coast-line it may be reached.’

The mother heard the words and repeated them to her boy ; presently, beckoning to the master to bend over her, she whispered with a final effort, ‘Save my child,’ and so, with a last prayer for his safety, her spirit took its flight.

All unconscious, the boy slept with her dead arms clasped round him, her words still ringing in his ears.

When daylight appeared, it showed those who still survived a long line of sandhills, fringing a broad, unbroken strip of surf, towards which they were directly heading. They could distinctly hear the thunder of the waves as they beat upon the shore. Each eye was strained to find some opening in that dread line of tossing foam, but in vain ; far as sight could reach, the same inhospitable, repellent foreshore extended. The storm had by this time abated, and, though the sea was still high, yet the sight of land had revived the courage of the castaways and awakened hopes which were all but dead in the hearts of the boldest. It was now that Captain Eli Larch proved himself a true commander. Cool and collected, with encouraging words he urged all to cling to any support available, until the wreck was driven as near the land as the waves could carry her. His practised eye had shown him that she must, in those tremendous rollers, strike the bottom many times before becoming fixed, and he

hoped that all who retained their hold might then be washed ashore, or, as the tide fell, swim or wade to land.

The boy had roused himself, and with a dazed look gazed into his mother's dead face as Larch unwound the cold, stiff arms from round him.

'Courage, Roland,' he whispered ; 'she is in heaven and suffers no more.'

With a calmness that seemed almost apathy, and that is but rarely seen in the young under such circumstances, the lad kissed the set lips a last farewell, and then fixed his eyes on the shore. It was time ; a huge wave caught the hull upon its crest and swept it swiftly along, far into the line of breakers ; then, in its reflux, dropped it, with a terrific bump that rent the timbers asunder, upon the sand. For a moment the wreck remained stationary, then another billow broke over her with a deluge of water that carried half the devoted people away. Another rapidly followed, and tossed her, with a fearful shock, a hundred yards nearer the land. There she stuck, sea after sea breaking over her, each sweeping more of the despairing wretches from their hold. Fortunately, this did not last long ; the sea had been going down, and those on board could occasionally see the bottom when the waves receded. They were further encouraged by seeing that some of those washed away were carried far up the sloping beach by the big billows, and then were able to crawl out of their reach. As these gained strength, they assisted their less fortunate fellows who were being sucked back again by the retreating waves. By such means, six or seven were collected in safety on the shore, while fifteen still remained alive on the wreck, but of these, four were in a dying condition from the exposure and hardships they had undergone. As the tide continued to fall, the violence of the surf subsided, and the captain fastened a line to a buoy in hopes that it would float ashore. For a time it tantalised them, passing to and fro, now as far out to sea as the rope would allow, and then approaching the edge of the breakers. Eventually it was caught in the break of a gigantic wave and hurled high up on the



beach, where it was secured by a sailor waiting for the opportunity. This accomplished, Captain Larch entertained no doubt that all on board could be saved, and insisted that none but the strongest should attempt the task of passing along the line until the tide was much lower, and the danger consequently less. The impatience to leave the brig was so great, however, that nearly all were anxious to try. A big sailor, whose strength seemed little impaired, went first; and, though those on shore strained on the rope, it sagged so much that he was submerged in the rough water nearly all the way. His endurance stood him in good stead, and, though greatly exhausted, he reached the land. Another immediately followed, and hand-over-hand had rapidly covered half the distance, when a fierce wave caught him in the curl of its break and tore him off. Then it appeared to the awe-struck spectators to play with him, tossing him in savage wantonness round and over, finally carrying his body out to sea. After this terrible sight, the commander had no difficulty in restraining the remainder until somewhat later, when the tide had fallen sufficiently to admit of the passage being made with safety. The sun had been shining for several hours, and under his genial warmth all had recovered much of their strength and courage. After the male passengers were conveyed on shore, the strong assisting the weak, efforts were made to save food, clothing, and other necessities. As the water continued to go down, this was comparatively easily accomplished by running them along the line. By this time it was considered safe to land the women. The body of Mrs. Grantley had been swept away when the vessel first struck, and was seen no more. The other two women had crouched together in terror since the ship became a wreck. Sheltered as much as possible and assisted by the men, they would inevitably have been washed overboard if they had not been securely lashed to the stump of a mast. They were now carefully conveyed through the still seething surf to the land. Last of all, the captain left the wreck with the boy clinging to him. Seth Jacobs, the Jew, had lingered till nearly all had gone,

evidently anxious to reach his cabin; but the vessel was completely waterlogged, and all his efforts were in vain.

‘You must leave everything below,’ said the master, observing his attempts, ‘for the present, and think only of your life. If the weather continues fine we may, at the lowest tide, find the battered hull not only high and dry but drained of water, and be able to save many things.’

Worn, dispirited, and exhausted, the cupidity of the usurer gave way to the instinct of self-preservation, and he made for the shore.

## CHAPTER II

### ILL GOT—ILL GONE

IMMEDIATELY on landing, Captain Larch selected a sheltered place amid the sandhills as a camp. Here a fire was lighted at which the wet and wearied survivors could dry and warm themselves. Scarcely any food had yet been brought from the wreck, but fortunately those who first reached the land had found, when pulling on the rope, that their feet turned up numerous cockles from just under the surface of the wet sand. To half-starved men these were very palatable, and sufficient were easily obtained to satisfy the hunger of all. Fresh water was also discovered in a shallow well, evidently made by the natives, a short distance beyond high-water mark. Thankful for their rescue, and with their hunger and thirst appeased, the exhausted castaways soon forgot all their troubles in sleep.

When morning came, the tide was very high and the brig had sunk deeper in the sand, and, being surrounded by a boiling waste of water, it was impossible to obtain any food from her. Under these circumstances, the survivors of the wreck were compelled to breakfast on the shell-fish left from the previous evening—the present state of the water preventing them from procuring more.

The captain then proceeded to examine the country. On

mounting a sandhill he found that the line of surf, with its fringe of hummocks, extended as far as could be distinguished to the south-west, with a scarcely perceptible curve to seaward. To the east the coast presented much the same characteristics, but in the distance the land appeared to be higher and bolder. He was surprised to find that inland, only a few hundred yards away, lay a narrow lake of water evidently of great length, which apparently ran parallel with the coast far to the westward. In the opposite direction it ended in a swamp, or salt marsh. He was soon standing on its margin, and found the water both salt and shallow. Retracing his steps, he saw fresh water oozing from among some rushes, with a path leading to it. At first it appeared as if it was made by wild animals, but on looking closer he saw the marks of human feet. He knew they could not be the footprints of his own people, for among them were those of little children. In that desolate place whose could they be but the tracks of savages, probably hostile? and if so, the situation in which he and his companions were appeared a desperate one. Clearly, at the fall of the tide, not only must provisions and clothing be obtained from the vessel, but weapons also. Disturbed by these thoughts, and with a tremor at his heart such as he had not felt even during the height of the storm, he returned to the camp. On the way he observed further traces of the recent presence of the savages, in heaps of cockle-shells by the ashes of a still smouldering fire. From these signs it was obvious that the aborigines must be still in the neighbourhood. Common prudence, therefore, suggested that he should keep his people as closely hidden as possible, until they were able to procure arms from the ship. Luckily they had, to get out of the wind, camped in a deep hollow surrounded by bushes. But the fire—would the natives see that? If so, it would probably not excite remark, as they had left their own burning in their abandoned camp. The wreck, however, would certainly be discovered whenever they came over from the lake-side, and this they were likely to do as soon as the weather settled down after the storm.

Pondering over these things, he reached the hollow, and in a few words calmly told the castaways what he had seen and the conclusions at which he had arrived. To the eastward there could not be any habitation of civilised man within many hundred miles ; but to the west there was probably a whaling station, where they had seen the flagstaff on the cliff. In that direction, as soon as they had brought on shore all that would be of use to them, he proposed to proceed, keeping along the coast. He conjectured that it could not be more than a hundred miles, and it might be considerably less. Travelling would be easy and comparatively rapid by keeping on the hard level beach when the tide was fairly low. Meanwhile, it was imperative that all should remain perfectly quiet where they were, so as to give the least opportunity of being observed. Except to obtain a supply of water there was no necessity to leave their shelter, and for many hours all rested, and were much refreshed thereby.

As the day advanced, the tide ebbed so far that, to their great delight, the hull was almost high and dry. There was now no difficulty in getting on board, and, after a sailor had been posted on a high sandhill to give notice if the natives approached, the remainder of the party proceeded to the wreck, the sailors first going on board to send on shore whatever was most required. They were soon enabled to land a few casks of flour and salt meat, tins of biscuits, and other kinds of food, in fair condition. Articles of clothing, tools, and sails for tents rapidly followed. Fire-arms were also procured, in a wet and rusty condition indeed, but capable of soon being rendered fit for use. To their great disappointment, however, no powder was found. This much increased Captain Larch's anxiety, as he well knew how difficult it would be to protect his party from the savages without effective fire-arms. All weapons likely to be of use were, however, taken to the camp.

The Jew early penetrated to his cabin and laboriously carried on shore a small trunk.

'Clothes and a few necessities,' he muttered to a sailor

who wondered at its weight, 'which have got very wet. Poor wretch that I am, it is all I have in the world!'

For a few moments he sat on it to rest, and then, without attracting attention from his busily engaged companions, took it up and disappeared behind the sandhills.

The goods which had been removed by them from the wreck having been brought ashore, the party next devoted their energies to having them carried to a place of safety, leaving to a future opportunity the search for other articles. The blankets and clothing too were spread out to dry on the hot sand and bushes, and soon were in a condition to render the position of all more comfortable during the coming night. It was nearly dark when, tired out with their exertions, they assembled again in the hollow and made arrangements for the only really good meal they had had for several days.

In the midst of all his many duties, Captain Larch had taken care to accompany Roland to his mother's cabin and bring away, among other things, a strong-box which bore the lad's initials. Knowing her firm conviction that in her failing health she would never live to reach land, he felt assured it contained valuables placed there by her loving care. This case he carried to the camp himself and determined to open on the first opportunity, not only for the purpose of drying its contents, but because, in their critical circumstances, little except food could be taken with them, and therefore the heavy case itself must be left behind. It was extremely fortunate that in consequence of the cold wind they had fixed the camp in such a secluded situation, as it enabled them to light fires and dry their saturated possessions, as well as do the necessary cooking, without much fear of attracting attention.

As soon as supper was finished, the captain explained that he wished everything opened that evening and dried, with a view to an early start for the supposed settlement. This he proposed making the following day, as soon as the state of the tide admitted of travelling along the beach; and he urged the absolute necessity of only attempting to carry such articles as were indispensable. In pursuance of these instructions,

each was assigned some duty, and the absence of Jacobs was now discovered. The big sailor was the last who had seen him as he carried his trunk towards the camp. This lay open near the spot upon which he had slept the previous night. The articles of clothing and other things it had contained still showed the distinct impression of a square box, which could not be found. It appeared, therefore, as if he had taken this to some retired spot with a view to examining the contents in private. That these conclusions were only partially correct we will now show by following his movements, as they have an important bearing upon this veracious story.

Having opened his trunk, Jacobs seized a strong-box within, evidently of considerable weight, and, looking round to see that he was not observed, made off through the sandhills in a line with the sea to the east. Except to pause a little to take breath, he did not linger until he had travelled nearly a mile.

He then stood immediately under a tall tree of the eucalyptus tribe, standing much higher than its fellows, on a small open flat commanding a view, between two sandhills, of a strip of sea. The tree was large and healthy with the exception of one limb about twelve feet from the ground, which some gale had broken off a few feet from the trunk. The stump thus left pointed directly to the strip of sea through the sandhummocks. Nothing remained of the fallen branch, a bush-fire having years before swept over the spot and consumed it. After carefully noting these particulars, the Jew set down the box and with his knife cut a long stick, trimmed off the twigs, and then measuring it with his hand he muttered :

‘One foot—two—three—four—five—six feet.’

He then put the stick up to the base of the broken limb.

‘One,’ he said ; another length touched the ground. ‘Twelve feet,’ he added.

He then stood directly under the dead arm with his back to the stem of the tree, immediately facing the spot of water. Then observing a twig precisely in line, ‘That will do,’ he

murmured, and proceeded to measure the distance with the prepared wand.

‘One—two—three,’ he went on up to five—‘thirty feet.’

Then he hesitated.

‘It will be safer,’ he thought, and carefully measured exactly ten feet at right angles from where he stood to the west.

With the point of the stick he traced a square about the size of the box, and, using his sinewy hands, rapidly scooped out the soft earth. It was soon done and the case brought to the spot. Lingeringly, even lovingly, he put it in the hole, and then hesitated once more.

‘Only another look,’ he whined, and raising it from the cavity he opened the lid. ‘How they sparkle!’ he whispered; ‘and yet I almost like better the dull yellow of the gold. Oh! it’s hard to leave them in this horrid hole; yet what can I do? I’ve got as many about me as I can conceal. To carry them all myself is impossible, and trust them to others I dare not. They think more of their paltry lives, and would fling them away when tired or at the first alarm. Even if I offered great rewards, they would guess my secret and eventually rob me of all. No, though it is like leaving my heart’s blood, I have thought it over and it must be done.’

Gazing at his treasure fondly, he murmured as if to things of life, ‘I will come back for you, my dears, some day,’ and, gently closing the lid and replacing the box, he covered it up with the loose soil. Then, with lingering steps and bent head, he turned away in the direction, as he thought, of his companions, but really straight inland. After walking half a mile or so, he sat down on a log, and, taking a small piece of parchment out of his pocket, he began to write, not observing a pair of fierce bright eyes glaring at him from behind a bush. The writing finished, he took a shining brass box or locket from the breast-pocket of his coat. It was remarkable in shape, being fantastically formed to resemble a turtle clinging to a chain—the very thing to excite the cupidity of an ignorant savage.

Pressing a spring, it opened, and the Jew carefully placed the parchment within. Rising to his feet, he was about to put the chain attached round his neck, when the watching savage, bounding to his side, struck him a heavy blow on the head with the club he held in one hand, as he seized the locket with the other. As he prepared to repeat the stroke, another form almost equally wild interposed his weapon. The two gazed at each other for a moment, and then the first, snatching the coveted locket from the hand of the Jew, darted away.

The other, scarcely noticing his departure, stooped over the man he had rescued and fixed his eyes on the unconscious face; then he sprang to his feet with an oath, exclaiming: 'The London Jew, by God! How comes he here?'

The words had hardly left his lips when two more black men appeared, evidently his companions. In their own language he told them what had occurred, describing the savage who had fled as a tall, powerful man, with a broad scar across his brow and right cheek.

'Talco!' ejaculated one, with considerable apprehension in his tone, and, beckoning to the white man to follow, they moved away. At first he hesitated, but, humanity or curiosity prevailing, he picked up the insensible form of Jacobs and hurried after them.

Presently they stopped, and in low, earnest tones urged him to leave the dying man, saying that he could not live, their camp was far off, and they were in an enemy's country. While thus disputing, they arrived at a running stream, and, as they crossed, the Englishman—for such he obviously was—bathed the face of the Jew with the cool water. This somewhat revived him, and, after greedily drinking, he staggered to his feet, and groping with his hands about his neck, as if feeling for something, in a dazed way he began muttering the jingle:

' Under the tree,  
Facing the sea,  
One, two, three.'

Seeing that he could now walk with assistance, the white





The Bluff, East View:



Cape Couedie, Kangaroo Island:



man placed himself on one side and a black fellow took the other, while his companion led the way. Thus supporting the wounded man, in an hour's time they approached a small fire, around which sat some half-dozen savages. Without a word, they flung their burden down in the light of the flame ; as they did so, he fainted, but no one appeared to notice or care about that.

The eldest man, after looking at the inanimate form, demanded, in quick peremptory tones, an account of what had occurred. At the name of 'Talco' he picked up his waddy and was about to knock the Jew's brains out, when the white man interposed. An altercation then ensued, the old warrior urging 'that they might be pursued, and must retreat to their own country at daylight. They were a hunting party, and having been successful had heavy loads to carry, without encumbering themselves with a dying man.'

To which the other replied that 'they could kill him in the morning, if he did not die in the meantime. Perhaps he might be able to gather from his talk how he came there, and where his friends were.'

This appeared to satisfy the leader, and the Englishman devoted himself to recalling Jacobs to consciousness. He was partially successful, and the Jew began muttering the old refrain,

' Under the tree,  
Facing the sea,  
One, two, three.'

many times over ; then with an effort he continued :

' Four, five, six, twice six are twelve, five sixes are thirty. How they sparkle ! yet I love the yellowboys the best.'

Again he sank into silence, except for his heavy breathing.

The watcher attentively listened and watched as he bent over him. Once he tried to shape the thoughts of the dying man into expression by questioning him, but with an almost imperceptible start the Jew relapsed into silence. The pause continued so long that the listener feared he would speak no more ; then he began again, though his voice was weaker :

'What—could—I—do—but—hide—them—in—the ground?  
I—shall—know—the—place—again—though that—black—  
devil—took—my—box—with—the—directions—in—it!'

The sentence died away in an almost inaudible whisper, but the face of the man who bent over him showed that he understood its meaning.

At the first streak of dawn the band rose and prepared to move on. The breathing of the dying Jew had become stertorous, but he occasionally muttered the same monotonous jingle, as if his thoughts were in some confused way still dwelling on his treasure. With a stern expression on his bronzed face, in which, however, there was a gleam of satisfaction, perhaps of triumph, the white man left his side. He heard the thud of the old warrior's weapon on the defenceless head, but he did not interfere this time.

'Better so,' he said, 'than leave him for the flies and ants to torture like a dying sheep.'

### CHAPTER III

#### THE MASSACRE

WE must, however, now return to the camp of the shipwrecked people. For them the night passed without any event calling for narration, and the whole party rose much refreshed and eager to begin their journey. Before this could be done, however, many preparations were necessary. Moreover, the Jew was still absent, and the commander felt that some search, in common humanity, ought to be made for him. Accordingly, after breakfast, a close examination of the country round the encampment was undertaken, but without result. Fearing the worst, Captain Larch sent two sailors to a very high hummock along the coast to the east, trusting that some trace of the missing man might be found. From its summit a considerable range of country could be observed, as well as a long reach of sea-beach; they were also instructed to watch for any signs of savages.

Captain Larch now took aside and examined the contents of the trunk he had brought from Mrs. Grantley's cabin. In a tin case, carefully sealed, there was a long letter addressed to Roland, with a small packet of papers marked 'important,' and a few sovereigns. The packet consisted of a bank draft for £3000 payable in Sydney in favour of Roger Grantley, and his will, which, from the date, had evidently been made just before sailing from England. Putting these papers together, the captain folded them carefully in a thin piece of waterproof, and finally stitched them up in the breast-pocket of the lad's jacket.

'My boy,' said he, 'something tells me that I shall not escape from the perils that encompass us. I cannot leave these poor people, whatever happens; and indeed, if the savages attack us, as they probably will, and I attempted to fly, they would almost certainly overtake me. You can run like a deer, for I watched you on the beach yesterday. Almost with her last breath your mother made me promise to do my best to save your life. What I am doing now I believe to be the best that can be done, on the honour of a sailor. You remember the high bluff, with the flagstaff on the top, that we passed in the storm? We can in the early morning see a long way to the westward, in which direction it lies, and I have watched for it, but it is too far off to be sighted. The beach runs comparatively straight for a great part of the distance, perhaps nearly all the way. If you are parted from me, keep close to the water, so that the waves may obliterate your footprints, and travel by night, as then the blacks are least likely to see you. The cockles in the sand will keep you going if other food fails, but you must carry some with you when we move from here, so as to be prepared for the worst. There is certainly some kind of settlement on the sheltered side of the headland. Keep that in mind, and on the second day I hope you may sight the bluff. God grant that we may not have to part; but remember, when I give the word, stop for nothing—run for your life, and may God bless and protect you!'

The brave man, nearly choking with his emotion, took the sobbing boy in his arms and kissed his forehead. Presently he suppressed this unwonted weakness, and they returned to the camp. Roland was there provided with a small canteen to hold water, which he slung over his shoulder, while he filled his pockets with ship's biscuits.

The men who had been sent to look for the Jew now appeared, and reported that they had discovered no trace of him. From the knoll there was a very extensive view, unbroken in any direction. They had seen smoke rising in several places along the coast to the east, and more inland, but none in the vicinity of the encampment. The lake running parallel with the sea, already mentioned, they described as stretching far as the eye could reach to the westward. Last and most important, around the east end of it a large party of blacks appeared to be approaching. This intelligence greatly startled the whole party, each individual desiring to flee at once. The captain quieted their fears, and told them they must keep under cover, as the natives were so near, until darkness set in, when they would start. Meantime the fires were covered with sand and extinguished, and every one hastily adjusted his load in readiness for the signal to march. Scarcely was this done, however, when from every side through the dense bushes black forms burst upon them. Astonished and bewildered, the whites shrank together, but there was no demonstration of hostilities on the part of the intruders. Though armed with spears and clubs, or waddies as they call them, they made no attempt to use them ; on the contrary, they appeared to be in excellent humour, laughing and pointing in a wondering kind of glee at the women and the many articles of bright clothing in the camp. Seeing them so peacefully inclined, Captain Larch advanced unarmed and tendered a gaily striped rug to an elderly man who seemed to be a chief. The savage was intensely delighted with the gift, and placing it round his shoulders he stalked among his admiring companions. The natural result followed ; each and all required some gift, and

the resources of the camp were severely taxed before they could be appeased. The captain then endeavoured to explain their position, indicating that they had come from the sea by pointing to the wreck. The savages apparently understood, and by their signs and gestures it appeared evident that they had heard, if not seen, white men on the coast to the west; but when the captain attempted to move off in that direction with his party, they interposed, and, by shutting their eyes and lying down, showed him that he had better not start until the morning. As they seemed so friendly, and resistance against such numbers was hopeless, the captain, after consulting his companions, decided to remain. The natives showed much pleasure at this, and at first wanted to take them to their own camp; but, when objections were made, they at once acquiesced by dropping the articles they had picked up to carry.

As soon as they saw the fires being lighted and other preparations for spending the night in progress, they nearly all disappeared, and in the course of an hour could be seen making their camp a short distance away. Their close proximity was a source of alarm to the more timid of the castaways; but thus far there seemed no cause to apprehend treachery. The night passed without further incident. The following morning a few articles were distributed among the women, and, to prevent the temptation to thieve, Captain Larch ordered the rest to be packed up in readiness for departure. No opposition was offered, and when the Europeans were prepared to march a number of the blacks accompanied them, indicating that the path by the lake, which they called the Coorong, was the best way. Most of the day the journey was continued in a most amicable manner, but towards evening some of the white men straggled behind among the lubras, or native women, against the express commands of the captain. Several times he halted for the purpose of warning them; but the discipline of the ship had become relaxed, and his expostulations produced little effect.

That night he became seriously alarmed, as a number of

the sailors did not rejoin their party at all, and the demeanour of the blacks had also changed. That the overtures of his men to the black women were bitterly resented by the natives became very evident to the commander, and that night a watch was set to prevent any one else leaving the camp. The morning came without further trouble having occurred, but two of the missing men had not returned. Though the delay was exceedingly annoying and even dangerous, it was impossible to abandon them without making some effort to discover their fate. Three men were therefore despatched under orders to retrace the trail and endeavour to find them. Meanwhile, the party would remain in their present camp. Very few blacks were now visible, and in the course of the day they entirely disappeared. This Captain Larch felt to be a relief, though conscious that it could not be considered a sign of friendliness. The day at length drew to a close without the arrival of the two missing men or those sent in search of them.

Burning with impatience and anxiety, the rest of the party waited on, now scarcely knowing what to conjecture. At length the captain, fearing the worst, determined to move on when night fell, leaving a note in a conspicuous place stating the direction taken. At length darkness set in, and instructions were given to make instant preparations to depart. Each individual was in the act of picking up his load, when suddenly an appalling black circle closed in on them, every savage form hideously painted and, except for a tuft of fur suspended from his waist, stark naked. Circles of white were round their eyes, alternate bands of white and red crossed their chests and wound round their arms and legs. Their thick, matted hair was fantastically adorned with feathers, while others had swan's-down grotesquely sprinkled over their ornaments or adhering to their anointed bodies.

Spears, waddies, and other weapons were flourished with threatening gestures in the air around the cowering little band, who shrank together at the sudden appearance of a foe whom the uncertain light of the flickering camp-fires rendered almost diabolical in their hideousness.



The first shock over, the stout-hearted captain recovered his coolness.

‘To your arms, men,’ he cried, ‘and defend yourselves if attacked; but do not strike a blow if it can be helped. We must try to parley.’

He did try, feeling that the cutlasses of his party could avail but little against the spears of the black men. Ay! as little as did later the same spears against the white man’s powder and ball. But his pacific overtures were either unnoticed or wilfully misunderstood by the ruthless band bent on slaughter, and instinctively conscious that some of a race superior to their own were at their mercy. To do anything but return their defiance was, according to their ideas of warfare, a sign of weakness or fear, and they pressed on only the more eagerly. A tall and brawny savage, with a broad scar down the right side of his fierce face, which increased its natural hideousness, and a shining brass locket gleaming on his broad black breast, led them on. As he drew near, the captain dauntlessly stepped out, weapon held low but ready, with Roland close to him. On came the savage, however, and snatched at the boy. This was too much for the endurance of the sailor, and with a swinging blow from his left hand he dropped the black chief on the sand. The warrior was up in an instant, however, and aimed a heavy blow at his antagonist with the club he held in his right hand, which brought him to his knees. As he sank the captain cried: ‘Run, Roland, run, and keep to the beach!’ and the lad darted past the savage and was gone.

Nearly blinded by the stroke, the brave master recovered his feet, but spears and waddies were rained upon him, and again he sank, this time a dead man. The fight, if fight it could be called where resistance was in vain from the first, was soon over. Warned by the accident that had befallen their chief, the savages leapt out of arm’s length of the sailors, and contented themselves with showering spears and waddies upon the devoted band from the shelter of the surrounding bush. The sailors, having no effective fire-arms, were power-

less to resist, and soon all were killed or wounded. The last to fall was the big sailor, Jack Adams, who was transfixed by a long, barbed spear while standing over the two prostrate and defenceless women. The impetuous thrower sprang upon his prey to finish his work, but the giant caught him by the hair and thrust his weapon again and again into his breast before he died. This was the only savage killed, though several were severely wounded in a rush the sailors had made, after the captain's death, to try to break through the encircling band.

The dead and dying white men were alike hacked and speared in the blood-frenzy and love of slaughter common to all the aboriginals of Australia. The two women at the first clash of weapons had sunk clasped in each other's arms, in the midst of the little band. Peggy Puce fainted before the strife ended, but Mrs. Cantling had been roused by the fall of her husband, over whose body she now lay moaning. Presently a scarred old warrior snatched it away, and with a gesture so stern and threatening warned her back when she would have followed, that she shrank aside and clung affrighted to Peggy, who had now also awakened to the consciousness of their awful position.

A wild, piercing cry, known as the 'Coo-ee,' was triumphantly given, and was almost instantly answered by the appearance of a motley gathering of aboriginal life. There were old men, bent with age, grizzled, scarred, and ugly; old women, more ugly still, with legs and arms shrunk almost to the size of a walking-stick; younger women carrying, or leading by the hand, piccaninnies of various ages and both sexes, impartially characterised by the aboriginal juvenile's pot-belly; young men and girls, nearly all with symmetrical forms—the rounded limbs, shapely busts, clear bright eyes, and white glittering teeth of the dusky maidens giving them much of that indefinable charm that ever attaches to budding womanhood. Their dark glossy skins, with the tinge of bronze which is the natural hue of the Australian aboriginal until neglect, filth, and age have done their work, shone in the

glow of the fires that had been lighted, as one and all they crowded up, to wonder and jabber with loud and rapid articulation. Their interest and wonder chiefly centred in the two women, whom they gazed upon, touched and questioned, without satisfying their unsophisticated surprise.

Suddenly, from where their dead countryman lay, arose a wild wail of lamentation, now high and piercing, anon low, but always mournful and monotonous, the same dirge being repeated as it was taken up by each individual. The old and the hideous were the most vehement in the expression of the common grief, but the younger members of the tribe also occasionally joined in. This continued while some of the men wrapped the body in the scanty clothing it had worn in life; then they carried it forth, to lay it where others of his race reposed. That done, a frenzy of passion seized the old hags and some of the men and boys. They rushed upon the bodies of the white men with brutal, abusive cries; their clothes were torn away, and every indignity and horror that savage ingenuity could devise was perpetrated on the slain. Then, when their furious spite was appeased or spent, the mutilated remains were dragged down and cast into the sea, and derisively told to return whence they came. In this access of fury Mrs. Cantling and Peggy would certainly have been killed, if some of the principal men had not borne them away to the camp of the tribe, on the shore of the Coorong. There they were placed in the centre, where each movement could be observed by all around.

The whole of the band presently came in, staggering under the booty they had taken. Everything eatable was lavishly thrown about in the reckless manner of the Australian black in the time of abundance; some of the food was tossed away with contempt, while more met with the decided appreciation of the aboriginal appetite. Flour was voted unpalatable, and no wonder, since in their ignorance they essayed to devour it dry; but for purposes of personal adornment it was much valued, particularly when preparing for the festive 'Corroboree.'

The feast over, the relatives of the slain warrior struck up the wail again, and for a while were listened to with the respect invariably paid to the dead, but as the night advanced the elation and triumph of victory found expression in the national dance.

Forms were painted anew, fantastically but withal effectively; fires were stirred into a blaze; and in the background of the camp, on the brink of the water, the performers took their stand. The women began the chant, beating time upon opossum-rugs folded with the fur within, and to the clash of arms the dancers paced into the firelight.

The native dances vary. Frequently they are essentially of a peaceful and unexciting nature, in which mere amusement for the multitude is sought. On special occasions, when feminine visitors or captives are present, they are of a distinctly festive and immoral tendency; then proceedings are indulged in that polite society would shudder at, but which the laws of the Australian aboriginals sanction. Again, when the theme is war, the warrior is painted and bedizened with tenfold elaboration from the sole of his feet to the crown of his head. Weapons in hand, he parades proudly before his people, boasting of past exploits and vaunting of his prowess in the future. Hideous, grotesque, yet striking, he forms one of a whirling, bounding throng of warlike figures, passing before the bewildered eyes of the spectator with brandished arms and waving plumes in strange and swift evolution. Again, they form in line, square, or other intelligible order, and foot it featly, all the time uttering suppressed, fierce cries to the accompaniment of their trampling feet, the clash of weapons, and the beat of their rude music. Hour succeeds hour; often the whole night long, or indeed successive nights, are thus spent, and the excitement lasts until nature can do no more. It is the same with all the black-fellow's pleasures—eating, drinking, sleeping, or the tender passion; in all alike he knows or acknowledges no law to limit his full indulgence.

Under these circumstances it may well be surmised that

the fate of the unfortunate Englishwomen was a dreadful one. They were separated during the night, and only occasionally saw each other for several days ; and even that consolation was soon to cease, as they gathered that the tribe was to separate, one half to proceed down between the Coorong and the sea, the other round the east end of the lake.

It was now that the leaders of the party that had destroyed the shipwrecked crew claimed their rights over the captured women. They asserted, in the many wrangles that took place concerning them, that the awful custom of the tribe regarding women taken in war or stolen had been complied with, and that it was now time they were allowed to take them to themselves as their lubras. In compliance with these representations, before the parting of the tribe a council was held to settle in proper form the rival claims. The powerful savage who had led the attack demanded Peggy as his prize, alleging that he had struck down the chief of the white men, and therefore had a right to the first choice. An older warrior calmly asserted that his hand had slain more men, and his rank entitled him to the prize.

In utter misery the two women, scarcely comprehending the nature of the dispute, were clinging together a few feet away. As the quarrel rose higher, Talco, the scarred warrior, strode towards them and was about to seize on Peggy, when his rival dashed upon him, and a fierce combat began. Each was armed with only a waddy, and after a rapid shower of blows had been interchanged they simultaneously parted and rushed for their shields and spears. An aged, tottering old man, who exercised great influence over his people and had presided over the council, rose from where he sat, picked up a club, and, stepping to the unconscious women, with two quick blows mercifully closed their existence. The two combatants saw the deed, and the poised spears fell.

‘My children,’ said he, ‘the father of his people cannot see them kill each other for the women of a strange race. Because I knew that while they lived there would be much strife among us, I have taken their lives. Let them be for-

gotten, and let the men of my tribe be content with their own women.'

It was an act quite in accordance with the usages of the tribe, and met with the full approval of most of its members and the silent acquiescence of all. What to them were the lives of two women of whom they were already almost weary? As for the lubras, they would long ago have slain the white women had they dared and had opportunity served; but the deed that was sanctioned when committed by a chief would have been bitterly resented if done by a feminine hand.

## CHAPTER IV

### A RACE FOR LIFE

WHEN Roland dashed away, the moment was most favourable for his escaping notice, as the attention of all was concentrated on the combat between Talco and the captain. Once through the encircling bush, he was out of sight, and in a few minutes was on the beach racing for dear life. The horror of the scene he had left behind lent increased swiftness to his feet. Even yet, amid the clash of weapons and the yells of the savages dying away in the distance, the last words of his friend and protector seemed still to ring in his ears: 'Run, Roland, run, and keep to the beach.'

Instinctively—for as yet he could not reason—he did so; close to the water, too, for had not the captain particularly impressed upon him the necessity of that? A cool breeze refreshed him, while the sand was so firm and hard that running seemed the natural pace. He could run for ever over such a course, and he found himself speculating whether he could reach some distant object without pausing to take breath. He was still too confused to realise why he was running or whither; he could only recollect that his friend said he must go his fastest and along the sea-shore.

Presently he felt his boots an encumbrance and stopped

to pull them off. On rising again, the full loneliness of his position burst upon him. Would it be better to go back to the captain? possibly he was still alive, or some of the others. Then the terrific scene of his friends at bay, ringed in by a horde of bloodthirsty savages, came vividly back to him, and, flinging his boots away, with blanched face the poor boy fled on.

Fortunately the savages did not immediately discover that any one had escaped. It was only when the fight ended that, looking over the dead, the scarred warrior missed him, and then night had quite fallen and it was impossible to track him. At early morning a search was made and his trail followed to the beach, but the tide had risen, completely obliterating every further trace. Two small parties of the fleetest young men were told off, one to follow the coast to the west, the other to go eastward, in case the fugitive took to the land or followed the eastern shore. This we know he did not do, and, after persevering nearly the whole day with the untiring patience of the Australian aboriginal when in pursuit of his prey, the second party returned. The western trackers, however, three strong and agile young fellows, first carefully examined the lad's track to the sea, and observed that it did not make straight down to the water, but trended slightly to the westward.

The clue was found; the hunter's instinct told them that their prey had gone in this direction. Spreading themselves out to be more certain of finding the trail on the hard sand, they sped on. On this depended the early success of their pursuit, as if, from fatigue or the state of the tide, the boy went up into the sandhills to rest, and they passed without seeing his tracks, the chase might be much prolonged. At high-water he must do this, and then they calculated upon overtaking him, as the soft, yielding, dry sand would render travelling impossible for one so young after all he had gone through. Probably at daylight, if not sooner, he had retired, wearied, and sleepy, to the shelter of the bushes above high-water mark. If, therefore, they could cover the distance he

had travelled during the night, before darkness set in, they were confident of catching him.

On, on, on : no bloodhound ever followed a scent with so true and faultless an instinct as these savages kept to their trackless trail. Yet not traceless, for damning evidence of the accuracy of their conclusions is presently supplied, all unwittingly, by the fugitive himself. The unerring eye of the leading runner sees a dark, small object half-buried in seaweed, and with a grin of triumph he holds it up and points to its size and smooth inside surface, as a proof of the identity of the owner and its having been recently worn.

Poor Roland ! he little thought when he tore off his boots that they would make plain the track the waves had hidden. Yet this incident helped him somewhat, for his pursuers, with the cunning of the aboriginal, were suspicious of an intention to throw them off the scent. Possibly with bare feet he might attempt to pass into the bush, in the hope of his footprints being mistaken for those of one of their own people. There was the more colouring given to this reasoning by the fact that just there were a number of the tracks of the natives who during the previous evening had been collecting cockles.

Half-an-hour's examination conclusively showed that the white boy's foot had made none of these impressions, and on they dashed again, all the keener for the delay. Meanwhile the tide was rising higher, each moment making travelling more laborious ; and though with the light springy step of Australia's wild sons they skim over the softer sand, their speed is somewhat checked. Will they reach the hunted boy ere the sheltering veil of night falls, alike over the everlasting roll of those tempestuous waves, thundering in wild confusion upon that desolate shore ; over the long strip of bush-clad sandbanks ; over the lake sleeping so quietly close to the sea, that seems to hunger to absorb it ; and over the young life struggling bravely for existence against these inexorable, inhuman Australian sleuthhounds ?

We left Roland Grantley towards midnight flying for his life along what in later days became known as ' The Ninety-



Mile Beach,' a long stretch of gently sloping sand that stays the progress of the mighty Southern Ocean. Far out to sea the heavy rollers break, and then, in a turmoil of tossing foam, come rushing impatiently on, until their final force expends itself in a faint ripple, not an inch deep, on the barrier that has curbed their strength for ages. The receding waves leave the sand so broad and hard, that the feet of a galloping horse make but a slight imprint, while the beat of his hoofs echoes musically in the ears of the rider. Along such a course as this the human runner, if young and strong, can cover a great distance without feeling much fatigue. For weary hours—indeed, until approaching day began to dawn rosily in the east behind him—Roland had pressed swiftly on, breaking from a fast walk into a trot and again into a run. But as the sun rose he became aware that the hard belt of sand was being rapidly narrowed by the incoming tide.

For a considerable time, by keeping a little in the water, he felt but slight inconvenience. Then a larger wave would come up and force him on to the yielding sand, or compel him to wade in water so deep that the exertion was greater still, if progress was to be made; yet he doggedly continued, giving himself certain objects to attain before turning into the scrub to rest. One after another these were reached and passed, as he thought how interminable the day would appear if spent in inaction. But at last further progress became so exhausting that, when he came to a hummock rather higher than the others, with thick green shady bushes covering its sides, he decided to rest there for a time, promising himself that after a while he would push on again.

On climbing to the top, he found that it commanded an extensive view of the coast in each direction, as well as over the Coorong, behind, which seemed alive with countless numbers of water-fowl. Pelicans, black swans, ducks of many kinds, disported themselves by the brink of the latter, or on its shining, placid surface. It looked so peaceful that the wanderer was instinctively, almost unconsciously, moving towards it, when his eye caught sight of a spire of smoke rising

near the edge of the lake some two miles to the westward. Drawing back quickly, he lay down beneath the thick shade of the undergrowth, and determined to remain there till the tide had fallen sufficiently to admit of easy travel. Presently he began to feel both hungry and thirsty. Fortunately his canteen contained some of its supply of water, and the ship's biscuits were still in his pockets. When his meal was done, a drowsiness came over him. For a while he fought against it, fearing that the savages would kill him in his sleep; but exhausted nature had its way at length, and a sweet, refreshing sleep fell upon him.

Hour after hour he lay, his fair young face peaceful in its undisturbed repose, until the sun was half-hid behind his western veil. Then he woke with a start. Gone were the bright visions of home with his mother bending over him. There was the interminable, ever-surfing sea, there the lake, and between them the strip of country, of which he had lately seen so much, with its billowy surface covered with bushes and small trees, some green, others frosted over with ocean's salt almost to whiteness. There, too, is the broad stretch of wet sand left by the retiring waves, so broad now that surely hours ago he ought to have been gone.

Slinging the canteen over his shoulder, he rose to go, when far along the shore to the east three black specks appeared. They were miles away, but Roland knew at once what they were and their purpose. He had seen them through the bushes, and felt satisfied that they could not have observed him. Cautiously he crept through the sandhills, and then made his way to the beach through an opening. By this time it was dusk, and nothing could be seen of his pursuers. He gave one brief look and then hurried on. On, on—not even the fleet, dark runners of the Coorong could gain on the speed of those flying feet. If the lynx-eyed trackers have not seen him leave the shelter of the friendly bushes or pass down on to the water-line, he may widely increase the distance between them while they follow the trail to his resting-place and through the hummocks to the sea again. But

TOWN OF  
VICTOR  
HARBOR  
FROM THE  
EAST



ENCOUNTER BAY  
FROM THE  
WEST



when was the aboriginal's sight at fault? When we left the three trackers, the morning tide, which was highest about midday, was considerably retarding their progress. When the low water permitted, they had satisfied their hunger by scooping up cockles as they ran, and now, as they could only proceed slowly, one of the party was detached to fetch a supply of water from a native well over the sandbanks. A water-bag had been brought, made of the skin of an opossum, whose body had simply been carefully drawn through the aperture caused by cutting off the head. When filled, these vessels assume the shape of the animal originally covered by the skin, and, indeed, might be mistaken for it, were the head and fur left on. Such water-bags or bottles are common to all the tribes of the interior, and are frequently made of the skins of much larger animals than the opossum.

When the messenger returned, the two who had continued the pursuit drank their fill, and then they all slept till the falling tide enabled them to push forward with comparatively little fatigue. Then they rose, dashed into the sea for a moment, and away with all the tireless ardour of their race when on a blood-hunt. As the sun disappeared, their sharp eyes noticed the sand-knoll where Roland had rested; and though it was far distant, and the darkness grew deeper every moment, they made out a moving speck on the white sand between the scrub and the sea.

Roland from his elevation on the knoll, and with the line of white surf as a background, had half an hour earlier, when the sun had not quite gone, been scarcely able to distinguish their three forms. Yet they, with their marvellous powers of vision, had, in spite of all the disadvantages of a dead level and failing light, distinguished him, though smaller than any one of them. It was only for a few seconds, but the hunters knew that he was in front, and that from the space separating them, if the boy kept up the speed of the preceding night, the chase must yet be a long one. They passed the knoll without turning aside; they knew their prey was far in advance, and they hurried on with tireless stride. Far into

the night they sped swiftly on, until, fearing that their quarry might take to the land and so double on them, they camped to await the daylight.

Now, only a few miles in front, they knew that the father of all Australian waters, the mighty Murray, mingled his pure stream with the ocean, after traversing thousands of miles from his far-distant birthplace in the mountains.

Suppose the despairing boy did reach the brink of the fiercely flowing river, could his young strength stem a current which the best of a tribe of incomparable swimmers shunned? If not, how could he escape with the terrific torrent of 'The Mouth' before him, the boundless ocean to the left, the broad lake to the right, and a foe as inexorable as fate or fire at his heels? Utterly unable to accomplish his deliverance by means of the first three, what could save him from the last? Would it be possible to hide in the scrub, or cover himself in the sand, or sink to the nose in the water, and so elude them? They laughed with scornful glee at the thought, and, telling each other that they would slay him, if not before, then at least where the big waters met, and throw his body to the fishes of the great river, they slumbered as peacefully as if they had been models of purity and innocence.

Happily knowing nothing of the formidable barrier he was approaching, Roland sped along the smooth, level sand with unabated speed; sometimes looking fearfully behind for any sign, once or twice even staying to listen. Then away with hope growing stronger that dawn of day would give to view the bluff with the flagstaff, perhaps the buildings or tents of a settlement. It might be that the pursuers, knowing this, had abandoned the chase; and when light did come and he saw nothing on the line of beach behind, while far away, shrouded in the morning mist yet plainly visible as it rose abruptly from the sea, stood the noble headland he seemed to have seen in his dreams, hope grew almost into a certainty.

The very sight of the haven he had been so anxiously watching for gave him a momentary access of strength. He would push on without stopping until near enough to dis-

tinguish the houses ; then, sure of safety, he would gladly rest. When the sun, however, had risen higher above the hummocks, beginning to feel sorely fatigued, he left the beach, and, mounting a high sandbank so as to obtain a better view of the bluff, determined to repose awhile. There it stood, a remarkable natural object, perhaps twenty miles distant—too far distant for him to see the dwellings he had hoped for. As he gazed straight in a line with the hill, on the top of a wave he saw something—it sank out of sight and then rose again—yes, it was a boat with men in it coming towards him ! The joy, the relief, made his heart beat so that he could scarcely breathe. He frantically waved his cap, and finally threw it in the air ; going to pick it up, he faced the beach to the east. There, a few hundred yards from him, racing at full speed, by the edge of the water, were the three black trackers, their gestures showing their delight that the quarry was at last run to earth. With white, set face he flew down the hummock and along the beach for his life, the pursuing foes gaining upon him at every step, while the boat was now out of sight, and despair was once more fast gathering round the brave heart of the hunted boy.

## CHAPTER V

### THE WHALING STATION

TAKE up the map of Australia, and you will see in the southern portion of the colony of South Australia three great indentations cutting into the coast-line. Spencer's Gulf to the west, penetrating deep into the continent, terminates at Port Augusta in a natural harbour safe as a dock. Probably ages ago it was connected with Lakes Torrens and Eyre. St. Vincent's Gulf, in the centre, on the eastern shore of which now stands the fair city of Adelaide, the capital of the colony, also penetrates far inland, where it has its own ports and centres of population. Each of these vast sheets of water is comparatively calm, as Kangaroo Island, long and

narrow, and running parallel with the land, effectually protects the latter, and in some measure the former, from the mighty Southern rollers. On the exposed side of the island they expend their power, unbroken by islet or shoal since leaving the unknown regions that gave them birth. The easterly expanse, known as Encounter Bay, where much of this story is laid, unlike the others is open and unprotected. Unchecked by intervening land or rock, the full force of old Ocean's might seems to roll perpetually into that immense curve rather than bay from the far Antarctic depths and storms. The only power that avails to beat down the great rollers is the fierce, hot north wind, that comes sweeping across the arid plains of the stone-strewn interior. It is one strong element meeting another; but even in the height of the land-born hurricane's strength the everlasting billows still beat in a suppressed angry thunder on the exposed rocks and sands of the vast bay.

The coast-line of the peninsula lying between Encounter Bay and St. Vincent's Gulf is a remarkable one. Beginning in low rocky cliffs, where the hills join the Adelaide plains at Brighton, it grows in height and ruggedness, with short intervals of sandy beach, until near Rapid Bay it becomes extremely picturesque and even grand. Passing Cape Jervis, away from the shelter of Kangaroo Island, the Waitpinga cliffs rise boldly, abruptly, defiantly, to the increasing swell that expends itself on their base. Round the southern end of the peninsula, except for short breaks of heavy sand, the bold precipices continue with undiminished ruggedness, till they culminate in that magnificent natural feature, 'The Bluff' of the old whalers—since called Rosetta Head.

In it the Mount Lofty Range terminates after a sweep round the lower lands bordering the river Murray and Lake Alexandrina and part of Encounter Bay. Two miles to the west of it, set in the stormy sea, is West Island, forming some sort of shelter to an exposed bay formed by the Bluff running out nearly at right angles from the mainland. The island is only a few acres in extent, and is principally composed of



granite boulders. From its outer end a deeply submerged reef runs to the land—so deep, indeed, as scarcely to break the heavy rollers that furiously sweep through the passage.

Almost immediately on the other side of the Bluff, perhaps half a mile away, lies Wright's Island, between which and the headland is a pretty cove, nestling under the mighty brow of the wonderful hill. Barely two miles farther along the coast, but scarcely half that distance from the mainland, is Granite Island, the largest of the group. Away out in the open sea beyond it stands, like a sentinel, Seal Rock, a mere heap of jumbled granite boulders, defying the ceaseless thrash of the never-ending waves. Again, a few miles round the shore of the bay and projecting into the sea, stands 'Freeman's Nob,' a bold cape bordered with stupendous rocks, against which the rollers ever rage. This promontory, with the assistance of some outlying rocks, has made a determined attempt to form a natural harbour where some rest and shelter might be found from the continual strife outside, but with indifferent success.

Beyond this there is nothing but the long, monotonous stretch of shifting sandhills and nearly dead-level beach surrounding the huge bay. For many weary miles the only noteworthy object is 'The Mouth,' where Murray's waters rush to the sea. This is about twenty miles from 'The Bay,' the site of the old whale fishery under 'The Bluff.'

This bay, with its many islands and reefs ever veiled in white foam, is picturesque and beautiful. The fringe of foam, lining its blue waters and appearing and disappearing in ever-changing forms, lends it a charm peculiarly its own. Even in the calmest weather this is never absent, and the voice of the restless element is never silent. During the prevailing winds from the south, or the westerly gales, the fringe of white becomes a broad belt and the muttering of the ocean rises to a deafening, angry roar.

These characteristics of 'the unchanging sea' continue now, as when this story opens and Britain's daring sons and daughters first landed upon its wild shores. A metamorphosis

has indeed come over these hills, slopes, valleys, and plains, once clothed with all nature's prodigality and beauty. Pouring their waters into the bay are two rivers, formidable torrents in winter, in summer's driest time clear and charming. The Hindmarsh flows through the valley of the same name, and never stream meandered through a fairer scene of rich natural beauty: surrounded as it is by lofty hills, and clothed with magnificent eucalypti of many kinds, from the lordly blue and red gum to the drooping peppermint, with the handsome blackwood, shea-oak, and acacia in park-like beauty; splendidly grassed and rich with the wild, lavish glory of Australian native flowers. The sister stream, the Inman, winding through a valley just as fair to see and skirting the foot of Crozier's Hill, as the Hindmarsh does that of Mount Peerallila, passes through the hills that form the background of Encounter Bay. Each river is wooded to the brink, the willows and ti-trees of the new continent bending lovingly over the sparkling water.

Between the Inman and the curving hills that end in the Bluff there lay a thickly timbered stretch of gently undulating country; on the richer bottom-lands lofty gum-trees towered skyward, while on the slopes the smaller plant-life of Australian forests grew in luxurious profusion. Along the low sandbanks of the sea-shore, almost to the very water's edge, stood numerous trees and bushes that have now almost entirely disappeared. The hills themselves were covered, even up to the crest of the Bluff and almost to the extremest brink of the storm-swept cliffs, as far as Newland's Head, with the hardy, indigenous growth of the Southern land.

It was, indeed, just such a spot as would charm the senses of the recluse or attract the squatter with his flocks and herds. But the days of the squatter and the farmer had not at the period of this story yet come; the products of the soil lay neglected and unheeded, all but unknown. Not so the treasures of the sea. Man, in his ships, had followed the leviathan of the deep to these far-distant shores. More than that, he had already fixed his dwelling in the beautiful bay lying

between the two headlands described above. Under the shadow of the Bluff a whaling station had been established, and from its brow floated a flag, or rather a series of flags, by which the watchmen there on the 'look-out' were wont to signal to the boats away at the islands, when a whale hove in sight, to indicate its position. The look-out was there from early morning to late evening, ever on the watch for the great black monsters that abound in these seas.

The Bluff, so named by the whalers, seemed designed by nature for such a purpose, projecting as it does into the sea, and towering high and almost perpendicularly above it, so that its crest commands a wide view over the waters spread beneath—a view, indeed, only limited by the powers of man's vision or those of the instruments he has invented to assist it. On the very summit was erected a flagstaff with projecting yard-arms. When a whale was sighted, a flag was run up and possibly a smoke raised to attract attention more effectually, and this was followed by a display of flags of different colours on the yard-arms to indicate the direction in which the whale was seen. The boats which were thus signalled lay in readiness at the islands or the Nob, to be nearer the probable scene of operations.

The station itself nestled at the foot of the ridge that connects the Bluff with the hills which form the background of the bay. Protected from the west and south winds, wooden huts had been built to shelter the rude, bold, often lawless men who hunted the monster of the deep. All honour to these men, who were the first, the very first, pioneers of South Australia! In the long and glorious record of British pioneering they surely should find a place. They paved the way, in some sense, for the miner, the squatter, and the tiller of the soil, who followed to conquer and subdue the land, by conquering and making their own the wealth of the seas. But when we inquire into their relations with the wild aboriginal inhabitants of the new land, the merest instinct of justice compels us to condemn much of their conduct. Almost as lawless and unscrupulous as the old sea-kings of the North,

they paid small regard to the rights, matrimonial or other, of the unfortunate people amongst whom they dwelt. Modern editions of the Rape of the Sabines were by no means uncommon, though possibly not on so extensive a scale as the original. Individual instances of disregard of the institutions, customs, and feelings of the aborigines, where their women were concerned, were still more frequent. The white man, exiled from the society of the women of his own race, coveted the charms of her dusky sisters; and where, when unrestrained by the wholesome influence of law and order, or deterred by the force of public opinion, has the European learned to control his passions?

But even in the early days of which we are speaking, and among such rude communities as these, there was a general instinct of justice existing. That which the individual was willing to condone, or even more or less practise himself, he, as a member of the community, condemned. That the aborigines got the worst of it when brought into contact with the whites under such conditions, as they have ever since, is certain. Their resistance to the lust of the intruder has been misrepresented or denied, and the many cases in which they have been known to kill the ravisher have been assigned to any other cause than care or love for their women. Not one of the least of the wrongs done to the aboriginal race by his all-absorbing white brother has been, after conquering and debasing him, to traduce and malign him for the very vices to which he has been forcibly compelled to submit. Here is a true incident, if men of the time are not all liars, and memory can be trusted not to play more untoward pranks than we think.

There was a shortness of hands on a whaling ship at Kangaroo Island, and when the season was slack at Encounter Bay an agent went round in a boat to obtain the services of some of the unemployed men there. He was not very successful, and one of the few engaged, on arrival at the ship, repented and refused to join. He was therefore conveyed to the mainland, and a black fellow engaged to show him the native path

and accompany him back to the whaling station. This service having been loyally performed, another was demanded—the surrender of the guide's lubra. A quarrel ensued, and the black man's waddy fractured the white man's skull.

It so happened that a whaler was in 'The Cove' at the time, a whale having been killed, and the crew were engaged in cutting the animal up. By some means they became acquainted with what had occurred, and captured the black fellow—'I avoid calling him murderer,' said 'the old hand' who narrated the circumstances to the writer.

To prevent his escape what did they do? Chain him up, bind him hand and foot? No! none of these things. The expedient was at once simple and secure. They coopered him up in a tun-butt, a cask about the size of a hogshead, in the hold of the ship. How long he remained doubled up in that confined space will never be known, for even in the old days the tale was spoken of with bated breath among those who knew it. To save him from absolute suffocation they let him out at last. We can imagine the wily savage biding his time until his cramped limbs recovered their strength and his muscles their elasticity. Then, while forward in the bows, he dived into the water, and, let us hope, escaped, as it was confidently asserted that he did. If so, he would still have the police to deal with. It may be asked, why did the whalers keep him in the cask? what was their ulterior object? The reply has been given that even in those lawless times it was wisest to do certain things outside the jurisdiction of the colony. 'Better wait till we are away in the open sea, and then . . .'

## CHAPTER VI

### THE HEADMAN'S DAUGHTER

IT is a bright Australian morning, and the air is clear, even cold, with the south wind whistling through the shrubs and trees which adorn the slope of the ridge beneath which lies

the whaling station of Encounter Bay. The billows of the bay are troubled still with the swell that the storm outside has raised. On the many reefs studding it huge waves crash and tumble in wild disorder, casting their feathery heads in flying foam into the air. In the strong protected timber of the level land lying between the hills and the shore the devastating force of the tempest has left its mark on the giants of the forest, denuded of branches, with trunks wrenched asunder, or torn up bodily by the roots, taking tons of earth with them. Along the exposed slope above the cliffs, from the west side of the Bluff to Porpoise Head, there has been wild work indeed. There the trees have ever waged war with the prevailing winds and gales of the south and south-west, as is shown by the universal bend they have in the opposite direction. Those next the brink of the heights, more particularly, look as if one were chasing the other in rapid flight from a region so inhospitable. Dwarfed, stunted, and bent, they still form some protection to those farther from the sea, until in the more favoured situations they stand erect and fair to behold. For nearly a mile there is the prevailing bend northwards, which gives them the appearance of running away, those more inland not putting on so much pace as those near the ocean. These are principally shea-oaks, and, though their sloping position offers the least resistance to the storm, they strew the ground, torn up, twisted, and riven. Many of the small boughs of those on higher ground have been carried down to the Fishery itself. Branches and young green twigs, with beautiful flowers, have been strewn broadcast by nature's lavish, destroying hand to deck the waters of the bay. They fill the very 'trying-down pots'—huge iron boilers in which the fat, technically called 'condolly,' or blubber, of the whales is melting—and strew the roofs of the cottages and boat-house.

From the latter extends a long landing-stage, formed of saplings laid horizontally across strong spars, supported by thick perpendicular posts sunk in the ground, the whole sloping from the shed to the water. On this the whale-boats

are run up into cover every night, and down again in the morning, to go off in pursuit of the huge quarry. There are dwelling-houses as well—two, near the boat-shed, much resembling each other. From them loud masculine voices may be heard proclaiming, 'It is time to get up.' From these, shortly after, emerge the rough, half-clad forms of several men. The first is 'Harpooner Jack,' a tall, handsome fellow about twenty-eight or thirty years of age.

'The blow is over at last,' says he, 'and when the cook has let us have breakfast we will make all snug again. Halloa,' he adds, 'there among the rubbish is the Headman's daughter picking out the flowers.'

'Harpooner Jack,' whose real name was John Frost, pulled bow oar in the Headman's boat. As his title implies, his duty was to 'make fast' the moment he was within striking distance of the whale. It required a strong arm and unerring aim to drive the heavy barbed weapon, with the thick, strong whale-line attached, through the air into the great game. In this Jack rarely failed, as his courage was steady and his nerves unshaken as yet by the periodical debauch on the strongest and coarsest Jamaica rum. Put him within reasonable distance, and that deadly dart would fly through space and sink deep into the flesh of the unfortunate creature against whom it was directed. Apart from these qualities, which perhaps constituted his principal merits in the opinion of his employers, he was a manly and fairly honest fellow. He would not pick your pocket, but possibly, if he found your purse, he might forget to return it. Morality among men of his class in those wild times was naturally of a laxer kind than our more correct period sanctions. Still, Jack was a good fellow on the whole, whose word either man or woman might depend on in ordinary matters. Of course, if the temptation to go 'on the cross' was too strong he could not help it. By this it must not be understood, however, that he would, under any circumstances, betray his 'pal': that, in the rude ethics of the community, was the unpardonable sin—a baseness that could not be condoned. His position was

that of first officer to the Headman, who steered the boat, and this gave him a certain authority over the other men, which, however, was by no means too stringent.

The Headman was, however, an autocrat ; his word was law during the whole of the fishing season, not to be for one moment disputed by any soul on the station. When that period elapsed each man was 'as good as his master,' perhaps better in his own eyes—particularly if there was any rum about. Mr. David Cleeve, the Headman, occupied the third cottage, situated a hundred yards from the other two, towards the Bluff, but under the same sheltering bank. He was both liked and respected by the little community he ruled. A consummate boatman, cool and daring, he commanded their admiration, while his imperturbable good-temper, justice, and open-handedness were qualities that won their regard. Physically he was a man after their own hearts: about thirty-eight years old, and over six feet high, with broad, massive shoulders and chest, above which was set a small head, with a jolly, round face lighted up by laughing blue eyes. His arms and hands were large, but perfectly symmetrical, and with all his bulk he carried no superfluous flesh. Upright as one of his own forest trees and strong as an elephant, his splendid form was a combination of all the manly perfections that the old Romans looked for in their gladiators.

His history none knew beyond the fact that he came from Van Diemen's Land. This might mean much or little. He never spoke of his past life, and he must have been a bold as well as an unwise man who ventured to excite the ire of the giant by unsolicited or impertinent questioning. His household consisted of a middle-aged woman, said to be the widow of an elder brother long dead, and a daughter of fourteen years. Mrs. Cleeve was a fairly well-educated person, about fifty years of age, homely in appearance, and with a rather silent, reserved manner. She had kept house for her brother-in-law since the child had left school in Hobart, and had done much to complete her already fair education, considering all the very unfavourable circumstances.



The daughter, introduced to us by Jack the Harpooner as engaged picking up the scattered flowers, is known by the name of 'Petrel.' An impression exists that this strange name was given her because she was born on a wreck under peculiarly painful circumstances, when her mother lost her life. To her the name does not appear strange, for the abbreviation 'Pet' is what she has been called at school and at home as long as she can remember. Of late she has seen nothing of other girls except among the natives. As we see her gathering her country's wild-flowers on that bright, breezy morning, she is as beautiful as any of them. Small and slight, with long black hair tossed in disarray down her back, and somewhat pale complexion, in spite of the genial Australian sun, all her features are regular and faultless, while her eyes are dark and sparkling, with splendid long black lashes sweeping over them. Altogether, she is as fair a girl as one could wish to see, and gives promise of attaining a beauty so perfect as but rarely falls to the lot of women. Of music as taught in the schools she knows nothing ; but her voice is sweet as the native warblers that sing around her in the antipodean groves. Unversed in the usual feminine accomplishments, she can shoot well, and no disciple of the famous Izaak ever handled rod and line more deftly. With fowling-piece or rifle in hand, she has often waited for the Cape Barren geese or pelicans which, in these early days, almost constantly flew over the whaling station backwards and forwards from the Murray and Coorong to the islands along the coast. Sitting on the slope above the huts, she has wondered why the pelicans always went in a wavy, undulating line, ever changing its shape, while the geese shot straight ahead in the invariable fixed form of a triangle, with the apex in front. If she brought one down, the triangle immediately assumed its shape again by the ranks closing up. Sometimes they would alight on the beach, and then the fowling-piece was brought into play with such effect that fat geese formed no unimportant adjunct to the viands of the Fishery.

Her devotion to her father was unbounded—he was emphatically her king of men; and he repaid it by a love that never slept. His little daughter was never out of his mind; even during death-grips with the gigantic creatures which it was his business to slaughter, it may be doubted if he ever forgot her. On her part, the moment the flag rose on the top of the Bluff signalling a whale in sight, Petrel raced off up the winding path that led to the summit. There, with palpitating heart, she watched the boats closing swiftly in upon their prey, perhaps one from ‘the Nob,’ another from West Island, and more from Granite Island or Seal Rock. She well knew her father’s among them, and sometimes the capture took place so near that she could distinguish his form standing high in the stern as he steered straight for the monster. Though she trembled for his safety, yet she longed to see his craft glide up first and Jack rise in the bow, harpoon in hand. Would he succeed in striking? Hurrah! the taut line, the peaked oars, the arrowy speed with which the boat dashes through the water leaving a streak of foam behind, shows that they have ‘made fast.’ Then the black back of the whale is seen, as he comes to the surface to breathe in the impetuous flight from the foes that cling to him. We do not know and can scarcely realise what the sensations and sufferings of the stricken whale are, though, no doubt, they are much the same as those of other hunted animals; but to man with his sporting instincts there can be few moments to compare with those in which his boat is flying at furious speed in the wake of the greatest of great game. What with the more than spice of danger, the rush, the wild excitement of the watery chase, it must be an ecstasy beyond compare. If the actors felt aught of this, so, in a double degree, did the child on the height above, as she gazed with wide, distended eyes at each movement. When the Headman at length entrusted the steering to one of his men and took his stand in the bows, with long lance in hand to deal the death-blows to the exhausted animal, her cheek would pale, for she knew it was the most dangerous moment. Necessarily close to

the desperate creature, one stroke of its tail might crash the boat into a hundred pieces or toss it high into the air. She had witnessed several such accidents, but hitherto her sire had escaped, each successful exploit increasing her admiration and love.

All this time we have been leaving Petrel gathering the wild bush-flowers tossed by the gale over the bank. Hearing her name called and turning to reply, she feels herself raised in the strong arms she knows so well.

'Dad,' she cries, 'isn't it a pity to see the beautiful flowers thrown about everywhere in the dirt?'

'Never mind, Pet, there are plenty more where these came from; besides, it has given you something to do this fine morning. Now, come in and tidy up this long tail of yours,' he goes on, taking up the heavy tresses in his great hand. 'Get your boots on, and when breakfast is over we will go up to the look-out; I fear the flagstaff has been strained in the storm.'

'And don't forget, dad, that you promised to take me to Seal Rock to see the young birds; they must be nearly ready to fly now. We were to go the first fine day, and that will be to-morrow—won't it, now?'

'Ay! ay! you wheedling little monkey! If this heavy sea goes down, and the wind does not rise again, and the boats have not all been smashed like the flowers, or the sky doesn't tumble in, or I am not too ill or lazy!'

The latter alternative seemed a great joke to the little maiden, as she laughingly jumped from his arms and ran into the cottage. The big man looked after her with a jolly chuckle, then sauntered over to his harpooner.

'Jack,' said he, 'we will, if the weather holds up, take the little woman with us to-morrow to "The Rock" for young birds, and perhaps do a little fishing on the reef. Get the boat ready for an early start and the tackle for schnapper; we ought to have good sport, if the wind drops to-night.'

By this time a vigorous 'Coo-ee!' gave notice that

'Auntie' (as Mrs. Cleeve was invariably called) had the morning meal ready. Petrel, now substantially booted and with the truant hair 'done up,' as the fair sex express it, again appeared to promptly carry her sire off.

'I believe you would stop yarning all day, dad, till everything is as cold as cold can be, and Auntie as cross as two sticks, if it wasn't for me. Come along, you old dawdle, run!'

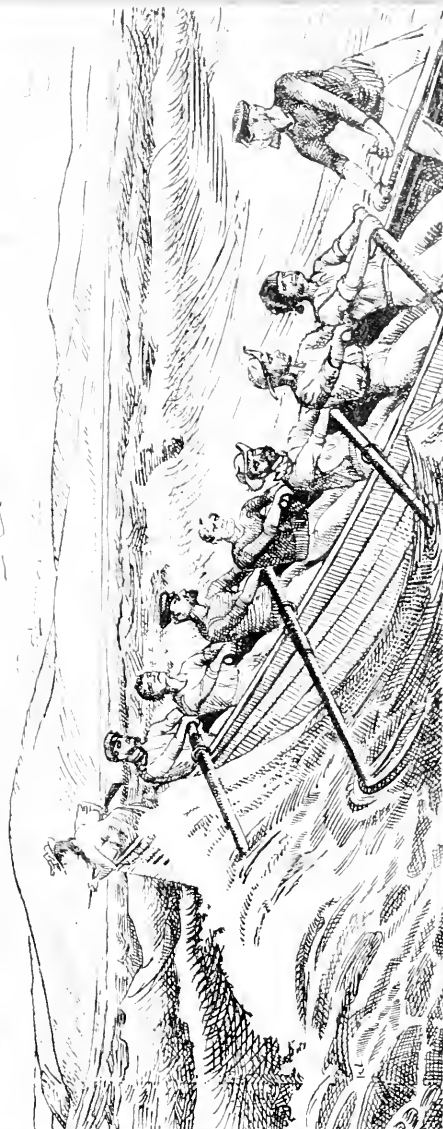
With a deep laugh from his great chest Mr. Cleeve obeyed.

'I'm not the build for speed, Pet—slow and sure is my line. More of the barge than the whale-boat cut, eh, darling?'

The room they entered took up most of the cottage, and served for dining-room, parlour, and kitchen combined. Two roughly made sofas or bunks with feather cushions and some three-legged stools, with a table in the centre, comprised most of the furniture. There was, however, a large cupboard occupying the recess between the fireplace and the end wall, which contained many of Auntie's household gods. Iron or tin utensils hung from numberless pegs, or were ranged on shelves. Of earthenware there was very little. Everything was scrupulously clean; the tinplates, pots, and pans of dazzling brightness were indeed shining evidence of the truth of Auntie's assertion that she did not spare 'elbow-grease.' There were only three other small rooms—one occupied by the Headman, another by Mrs. Cleeve and Petrel, while the third was kept for chance strangers, and was a lean-to outside the main building. Without the smallest pretensions to luxury, or even what we may consider the necessary conveniences of life, the building, with its fittings, made a comfortable dwelling for people accustomed to their rough, free life.

The breakfast was hot; the fish were fried to perfection; the cakes that had been baked on the hearth were deliciously light; above all, appetites were keen and digestions irreproachable. Milk there was in abundance, for the station owned a flock of goats which grazed and disported them-

ENTERING THE  
MOUTH  
OF THE





selves on the banks and among the rocks in the vicinity of the huts.

The meal over, Cleeve and Petrel started off for the look-out on the top of the Bluff. For about half a mile the rise was only gradual, but after that it became a steep climb. With firm, steady step the Headman breasted the mount, his breathing scarcely increased by the exertion. He would have helped his daughter, but, like an independent little woman, she zig-zagged actively about, and arrived on the summit before he did.

'Look, dad,' she cried, 'how plainly the Coorong beach can be seen!'

'Ay! ay!' he replied, 'right along the Ninety-Mile Beach round even to the other side of the Bay. The Mouth, too—I have never seen it plainer; but there is a big swell on the shore yet.'

'Where is the Coorong itself, dad? Can't the water ever be seen from here?'

'No, dear, it lies just over the white sandhills beyond the river mouth, where that opening in the big hummocks is.'

'There are dreadful blacks down there, aren't there, dad?' asked Petrel in a musing tone. 'If they get hold of any poor people, they kill them, don't they?'

'I think it very likely, Pet, though we don't know very much about them. They certainly killed Captain Barker just across the Murray—that high white knoll was named after him.'

'Dad,' she continued, 'supposing a wreck had been out there driving past during the storm the night you were up here, would you have known?'

'No, Pet, it was too thick with mist and spray to see anything; besides, I was only up for a few minutes. Tom Bedlow had carelessly left the flags flying; and while I was taking them down, one got loose and flew out to the head of the mast. It took me a little while to get the blessed thing down again. Just then the sun shone out for a moment, but I was too busy to look out to sea. It was blowing enough

to take a man's head off. Then the rain and sleet came on worse than ever, and I felt glad to get away.'

The girl had sat in a sad, silent manner on a stone listening to him, as if half-conscious of the suffering folk who had been so near rescue on that eventful night, if the bold, generous man had but looked the other way.

'All right, dad,' she cried, springing up; 'that horrid storm is over now, and the sea getting so calm that we shall be able to go to the Rock to-morrow. I long to see it again.'

The Headman now set to work to repair the lashings that secured the flagstaff, Petrel assisting by holding the cord and various tools required. When all was finished she exclaimed, 'Now, dad, I really must set one big stone rolling down the steep side of the Bluff into the sea. You can help me with this big fellow.'

It took but a wrench of the powerful arm to start the rock thundering down the precipice until, dashed into fragments, it disappeared in the foaming waves beneath. Petrel's great eyes had followed its rapid descent with absorbing interest; when she turned to her father again, he was gazing at several spires of smoke rising on the distant Coorong.

'One, two, three, four, more than half a dozen,' he counted; 'that is signalling, Pet, I believe. There, out go some of them and up rise others. Perhaps they are fixing up a fight among themselves, or maybe with our neighbours below there in the valley,' he said, pointing to the aboriginal encampment a little back from the beach and not far from the whaling station, 'though they don't seem to know anything about it, as they are quiet enough. Come along, dear, it's no use watching those smokes; if the darkies are up to some devilment, we can't stop it.'

The girl obeyed, and presently, in the excitement of the scramble down, forgot the melancholy forebodings that seemed to oppress her.



## CHAPTER VII

## PET TO THE RESCUE

THE next morning Petrel was up, not with the lark but with Australia's songsters, the magpies—full of pleasurable anticipations of the day's adventures. Jack the Harpooner was early despatched to the boat with a basketful of provisions, so that there might be no delay in starting the moment breakfast was finished. That over, and the usual words of admonition delivered by Auntie, they started for the landing-stage.

The boat was already on the inclined plane, the oars lying in her, and the crew, three on either side and one at the stern, were ready, when the Headman and his daughter took their seats, to run her swiftly into the sea. The moment they were in and the word had been given, away shot the boat; and as she entered the water, each man lightly sprang into his place, the oars dropped into the row-locks, her bow swung to seaward as the long steering-oar was wielded by the hands of Cleeve, and with a 'Give way, men!' the *Foam* dashed over the waves.

There was a fresh breeze from the south, bringing in a steady roll which broke upon the numberless reefs by which this portion of the bay is characterised. Inside Wright's Island they passed, straight for Seal Rock, the bright sweet face of the child full of delight as she watched the hundreds of birds circling round.

'Porpoises, dad!' she cried; 'and there is "Old Noah" with the slit in his tail. I wonder if he ever does leave the Bay.'

Noah, the porpoise so named by the whalers, and always to be recognised by the mark in his caudal appendage, was an old friend of Petrel's. Indeed, he was considered under her especial protection, and not a man belonging to the settlement would have dreamed of injuring him. Soon they

approached Seal Rock, the surf breaking furiously to seaward over the reef that lies to the south-west of it.

‘Too rough for good fishing, Pet,’ said the Headman; ‘but we will land and look at the nests and young birds.’

‘Oh, dad!’ she cried. ‘Look at the seals—one, two, three, ever so many, and thousands of beautiful birds!’

The boat now drew up under the lee of the island, and Cleeve and Petrel sprang lightly on to a rock from the bows. One man followed, the rest lying off in the boat. The seals had tumbled off into the water after a leisurely stare, to the great amusement of the child. But the nests were there—penguins’, mutton birds’, and those of different kinds of gulls—some with eggs, others with young fledglings in all the grotesque stages between embryo chickenhood and the glory of full-grown plumage. Deeply interested in these feathered and unfeathered curiosities, Petrel had lingered behind, keeping her father with her.

‘There she spouts!’ came in stentorian tones from the top of the island.

‘Where away?’ roared the Headman, as he, all the professional ardour of the whaler aroused, with long strides rushed up the rocks.

‘Straight in line for the Murray Mouth, off Freeman’s Nob,’ was the reply, ‘and heading fast away.’

‘We must have a look at her, Pet,’ said her father, as the girl climbed to his side.

‘Hurrah, dad! Come along!’ she cried. ‘It will be such fun, and I do long to see the Mouth; you’ve promised to take me there ever so many times.’

It was only the work of a few moments to re-enter the boat, and, propelled by seven pairs of strong arms, the craft shot straight as a line after the big cetacean. A stern chase proverbially is a long one. On this occasion the whale had a long start, and was going at speed. The Headman, however, as he stood up steering, could see that they were gaining rapidly.

‘There she blows again,’ he cried, ‘not two miles ahead, and still making for the river!’

They were considerably beyond the Nob—now known as Port Elliot—which lies opposite the high sandhills, and protects Goolwa (then called ‘The Elbow’) from the strong southerly gales. A few more miles they pulled, and then the fish was seen lying apparently motionless on the water.

‘Only a “hump-back” after all, men,’ said Cleeve; ‘and now the beggar is off again out to sea as if he’d seen the devil. He’s not worth following, so have a spell, and then we will take a look at “The Mouth,” and try for a few mull-away.’

Leaving the chase, probably off to the Antarctic regions, to pursue his journey in peace, the crew peaked their oars, and lit their pipes while the boat drifted gently on. Presently some Cape Barren geese came sailing over, high in the air.

‘Too far for shot,’ said the Headman; ‘I’ll try the rifle.’

Just as he was going to fire, however, the birds came nearer, so he picked up the fowling-piece instead and fired, bringing down one goose.

‘Well done, dad! That is better than the pelican you generally shoot. Now, let us go to the Mouth; I’ll hold the rifle, as I mean to have a shot at that row of long-billed fellows on the beach, when we get near enough. They look so very grave that I want to wake them up a bit.’

They were now almost opposite the group of huge birds standing in solemn conclave on the shore, and in another moment the weapon would have been discharged, when suddenly the Headman shouted:

‘By Heaven, a white man—no, a boy—chased by black fellows!’

It was Roland running for his life, the trackers not a hundred yards behind him and gaining at every stride, while the great river’s fearful current stretched perhaps twice that distance in front of him as it raced out to meet the rolling surf and cut him off from what was now his only hope of safety—the boat.

‘ Oh, dad,’ pleaded the girl, ‘ go in and save him ! ’

The brave, open face of the strong man blanched, as he looked in her clear, imploring eyes filled with tears, and thought of all he risked ; then a look of firm resolve came into it.

‘ Men,’ he said sternly, ‘ it must always be a dangerous thing to enter “ The Mouth ” in an open boat—doubly so to-day with such a sea on, and it may cost us all our lives ; but we cannot see those black devils kill that boy, and do nothing to save him.’

A cheer was the only answer, and with powerful, regular strokes the boat headed true for the meeting of the waters. Skilfully handled, she cleared the curling waves at the moment of breaking, and shot half-filled with water into the churning mass of foam, every soul drenched to the skin, but safe from the pursuing sea. At the moment that she hung on the crest of the wave, the crack of the rifle rang out and the leading savage dropped. The others hesitated for a moment, and then made for the shelter of the sandhills. Presently the wounded man crawled after them, and all three disappeared. Roland, pale, bare-headed, and with his hair flying in the wind, rushed on and, tumbling headlong into the boat, fainted away.

Where now are the gallant crew and passengers of the ill-fated *Mary* of London ? Some, from sickness either of body or mind, weary not alone of the voyage but of, perchance, their own individual journey through life, have laid down their burdens as too heavy to be borne. The angry sea has swallowed others in the fulness of their strength. Last and saddest fate of all, when danger and disaster from the turbulent ocean have been surmounted, the rest have died a bloody death by the hands of man’s most inhuman foe, his fellow-man. All save one, the youngest of them all, have perished : the bold, strong leader and his stalwart crew ; the eager settlers, straining with natural impatience to reach the new home and begin the new life in this strange land ; and the tender women whose awful fate has been already told.

In the annals of Australia's colonisation there is no sadder episode than the wreck of the brig *Mary* and the massacre of her passengers and crew.

The sole survivor now lay in a swoon at the bottom of the whale-boat in the Murray Mouth, while Petrel was in very little better case, and the Headman and his crew were stirred considerably out of their usual equanimity. They had certainly rescued the boy, but at the imminent risk of their own lives, and they were in the awkward position now of being in the stream and having to get out again. Looking back at the wild rush of contending waters, it seemed marvellous how they had escaped safely through. They had touched land on the Coorong side near the edge of the breakers, and most of the men sprang out the moment the boat touched after Roland had jumped in, so as to hold her against the swirling current. They now ran her up the shallow water at the river-side for some distance, then, quickly taking their seats, pulled rapidly to the opposite side of the stream. This was done to put the torrent between them and the blacks, for it was impossible to know how many of them might be in the neighbourhood. If in force and armed, they might possibly attack under cover of the sand-hummocks. Once on the homeward side, Cleeve felt secure, and had leisure to attend to his daughter as well as the boy. Petrel, pale as death, was alternately laughing and crying; and Roland had opened his eyes in a stunned, inquiring way; then, apparently satisfied that he was among friends, incontinently relapsed into unconsciousness again. The father took his child in his arms and carried her to the shade of a bush, soothing her with gentle, loving words.

'You are the bravest little woman alive,' said he, 'and if you had not shot the leading black-fellow, they would have caught the boy. He owes his life to you, Pet.'

'Oh, dad,' she sobbed, 'I hope I did not kill him; but who is the boy? and isn't he nice-looking?'

'He ought to be for all the trouble he has given,' replied Cleeve, with a smile; 'but you must dry your clothes by the fire the men have made. As to having killed that varmint—

not you ; he was only hit in the leg, as one could see when he crawled away. But, Pet darling, it was a wonderful shot, out of a boat tossing like a cork in those breakers. I don't believe there ever was such a girl.'

'There never was such a dear old goose of a dad. But I do so want to hear who that boy is ; doesn't he look dreadfully ill ? '

Meantime the men had laid Roland on the sand and given him a little spirits and water, which greatly revived him for a few moments ; then he sank into a sleep, almost a stupor, out of which the Headman thought it would be cruel to wake him.

'We must wait, Pet, until his sleep is over before we question him ; but I expect there has been a wreck. How else could he have got on to the Ninety-Mile Beach ? We will camp here for a while, anyhow, so may as well dry our clothes and have some dinner.'

Hour followed hour, the wind falling to a calm as the sun declined, but still the boy slept on. Cleeve had thought of leaving the boat and walking along the coast to the station when the tide fell ; but he knew it would be a long, tiring journey for Petrel, and in the present condition of the lad it was quite impossible. Again, they might go up the river to the Elbow in the boat, so saving a considerable portion of the walking distance. While doing so, the stupor might wear off sufficiently for Roland to walk from there. Against that was the fact that it would be bad travelling, as there was no road. Of course, the boat must also be left if this course were adopted. Finally, after consulting with the others, the daring of the men prevailed, and it was determined, if the wind and sea continued to go down, that they should face the terrors of the Mouth again. This they did under much more favourable circumstances than before, for as evening approached a land breeze began to blow which further calmed down the already greatly reduced rollers. The boat was launched and the still sleeping boy laid in her, Pet taking him under her special protection and care. Then the word was given, and, under the impetus of the current and seven well-

plied oars, the whale-boat shot down the stream almost with the velocity of an arrow from a bow. Held true to her course by the long steering-oar in the powerful grasp of the Headman, who stood erect in the stern, into and through the breakers she sped, and dashed out to sea as if in contempt of their might. As she passed the surf, a loud cheer rang out that roused for a moment even Roland from his trance, and startled the savage foes lurking among the sandbanks.

'Are there any left besides you?' whispered the girl, as she bent over him.

'None,' he answered, and even as he fell asleep again the tears welled from his half-closed eyes.

## CHAPTER VIII

### A WHALE HUNT

FOR twenty-four hours Roland remained in the stupor of utter exhaustion. When he awoke therefrom, his mind was an almost complete blank. Of the return to the station, the landing, and his being put to bed, he could recall nothing. The last thing that was impressed on his memory was Petrel's shot, that rang in his ears again and again, with painful iteration, during his long sleep, if sleep it could be called. Carefully nursed, however, as he was by the kind people into whose hands he had so opportunely fallen, a few days completely restored him to health.

To the Headman he told his tale, from the time of leaving England to their sensational meeting at the Murray Mouth. There was something in the big man's honest face that at once inspired the boy with confidence, and he not only acquainted him with the fact that the draft was sewed in the breast-pocket of his jacket, but begged him to keep it for him. The packet was therefore opened and the contents carefully noted. The draft already mentioned for £3000 and £30 in gold was the value in money. There was also a long letter from

Mrs. Grantley to her son, which, from the date, had evidently been written during the last days of her life. This Roland kept as a sacred bequest to be frequently read and pondered over ; and, indeed, it was destined to exercise a lasting influence over his future life. Last of all, in a separate pocket was a crumpled-up piece of paper, on which the captain of the brig had written, almost immediately before the massacre, the following lines :

‘The bearer of this, Roland Grantley, came as passenger with me from England. Father died August 20th, 183—, mother perished on wreck. The boy, being fleet, may escape the death that I feel sure threatens us from the blacks now surrounding us. We have no arms to effectually defend ourselves, and most of the men and the women can only move slowly.                   ELI LARCH, Master, Brig *Mary*.

‘Wrecked, coast Australia, Nov. 18th, 183—.’

There it was, the last letter containing almost the last utterance of one of the best and bravest of England’s many unknown heroes. With moist eyes the Headman locked it up with the rest, knowing that some day it would be required, though he scarcely realised how. He strongly urged Roland to say nothing to any one about the money, as this would only excite remark ; and though the present men at the station would, he believed, defend rather than rob him, yet in such a community it was impossible to tell when the worst of characters might appear. Probably before very long a trading-vessel would put in from Port Jackson or Van Diemen’s Land. Certainly there would be some such means of communication at the end of the whaling season. It might then be wise for Roland to visit the former place, cash the bank-draft, and decide on his future course ; or, if he did not care to go, he could write.

‘Till then, or as long as you like, my boy, you must stop with us—indeed, you can’t go anywhere else,’ exclaimed the whaler cordially. ‘My little lass wants company badly—eh, Pet, don’t you ? When I am away after *condolly* you won’t feel dull any more, little lassie.’



So the matter was settled, and for many months nothing of greater importance than the frequent chase and capture of the great whales occurred. Then one morning a sail was sighted, bearing straight into the Bay. At midday she anchored in the cove under the Bluff, close to the shears, a wooden stage built in the water, alongside which the dead whales were taken to be cut up and stripped of their blubber. She proved to be the *Firefly*, a schooner sent by the owners of the Fishery with supplies. These having been landed, she was to take in all the oil and whalebone that was ready and sail for Sydney.

That night her master and Cleeve held a long consultation after the young people had gone to bed. In the morning, as Roland was returning from a vain attempt to catch fish for breakfast, the Headman met him.

‘No luck, Rolly?’ said he; ‘perhaps we feed them too well with condolly. Never mind, sit down here; I want to say that you can write now to Port Jackson by the *Firefly* about your affairs, but you had better not go yourself till the reply comes. I will put the letter in with mine, so that none need know anything about it, for it is not safe for such men as are in yonder vessel to suspect that you are the owner of so much money. I am not a business man, worse luck, so we must be careful. I hope that at the end of the season one of our owners, Mr. Danker, will come round. We can trust him.’

The next few days the boats did not go out, all hands being engaged in floating off the barrels of oil to the schooner. While this was going on, Roland and Petrel did most of the watching for whales at ‘the look-out’—without success, however, till the very day the loading was completed, when they discovered the leviathan of the deep almost under the Bluff and making for the Bay. Up went the flag proclaiming ‘a whale in sight.’ Roland then began signalling its whereabouts, but Petrel fled away down the hill like an arrow and met her father’s boat at the cove. He had seen her coming, and pulled in there for certain information.

With a cheery 'Give way, my hearties!' from the Headman, away shot the boat round the Bluff, the seven oars moving as if but one, and not a mile outside the surf they came in full view of the monster.

'There she spouts!' was the cry, as the water tossed in great jets high into the air. Petrel had climbed the cliff again, and she and Roland now eagerly watched the three boats racing for the honour of first 'making fast.' The Headman's was the nearest, but the whale continued to approach the others without getting nearer to his.

'Dad will be there first, you will see,' cried Petrel in great excitement. 'See how he makes the stern oar bend each time he gives a push. Go it, dad! go it!' she shouted as if he could hear her.

The whale had checked, apparently hearing the approach of his enemies; then he turned, his great head for a moment showing on the surface of the water, to race out to sea. It was too late; that pause was fatal, for Jack the Harpooner stood up just as the 'flukes' and tail of the monster lashed the sea into foam in the impetus of flight. Another second and his weapon flew, sinking with unerring aim deep into the black exposed back; and almost before the beholder could frame a thought, the line was strained to the rigidity of a bar of iron, and the boat was cutting through the water at a speed that dashed it over her sides in torrents of spray. Then down, down to ocean's depths dived the frightened beast, until the last lengths of the line were payed out. A few feet more and the axe uplifted in the Harpooner's hand ready to 'cut away' would have fallen. Cool and collected as ever, the Headman had seen signs of the whale's abating strength, and refrained from giving the signal. Presently the downward motion ceased, the line slackened, and the exhausted creature rushed to the surface to breathe, spouting water dyed with blood.

'Haul in now,' was the word, and the rope was rapidly coiled in the boat again. Off once more dashed the whale, heading almost directly for the Bluff, but evidently with failing strength. Another effort he makes to seek safety

below, but in vain ; the harpoon has been driven home and holds well, and the rope is new and strong. Too exhausted to dive far, he soon reappears not many feet away. A few strokes of the oars, while the Headman now stands in the bow, lance in hand, and the boat glides near enough for the powerful arm to transfix the great side with the long, keen weapon. A loud roar as of many bulls follows, as the men 'back water' out of danger.

From the look-out on the Bluff, Roland and Petrel can see the frequent spouting of blood, tinging the sea with crimson. The whale, in the agony of yielding up his life, rears his immense 'flukes' in the air and beats the sea with heavy blows of his tail. Then the other boats come up, and a few more deep lance-thrusts are given ; and with a final effort, half struggle, half mere dying shiver, called by the whalers 'the death flurry,' the enormous creature breathes his last.

'Well done, dad! hurrah for dad!' cried Petrel, in the seventh heaven of delight. 'It's the biggest whale this season. I daresay it will make forty tuns of oil.'

'Perhaps it will,' said Roland, 'and a good many more than that of smell.'

The whaler's daughter looked at the young English gentleman with a vast contempt ; then her sweet young face broke into a smile.

'I am sorry for your nose,' she said demurely, 'for that is a very big whale.'

'And so will make a very fine perfume,' he laughed. 'Well, I am glad your father caught him, and without any accident. It was a sight I shall never forget. Perhaps when I am a bit bigger he will take me out with him.'

The mere aspiration seemed, in Petrel's eyes, to make a very hero of him ; she, however, grew very serious.

'No, Rolly, don't go, it's very dangerous work ; the whales sometimes smash the boats and hurt the men dreadfully. I've seen two crews tumbled into the water, and once some of them would have been drowned, if dad had not got there in time.'

'Yes, Pet,' jested the lad; 'but they never swallow people, anyhow, do they? I don't think I'll go if I am likely to be gobbled up—even with the chance of being sicked up again like Jonah.'

But Petrel had scarcely waited to hear the last words. She was off down the hill to meet the boats at the shears, with the whale in tow.

That night, after the capture had been secured preparatory to the cutting-up process next morning, the letter about Roland to the Port Jackson banker was written, for it was arranged that the schooner should sail in the morning. A brief detail was given of the shipwreck, with the names of the captain and chief officer, and a copy of the draft. To these Cleeve added a short account of the escape of the lad, together with a statement that he had in his possession papers that undoubtedly identified him. He concluded by asking the banker to advise what would be the best course for the boy to adopt, not only to obtain the amount due, but with regard to his future course. All this was a considerable labour to the Headman.

'I'd rather kill a whale than write a letter any day,' said he. 'The harpoon suits my hand better than a pen.'

'The whales don't think so,' interrupted his daughter, with a merry laugh.

'Get thee to bed now, lass; I must be up at peep of day to cut up that big fellow lying out there before the sharks eat him up.'

The following morning the schooner sailed early, leaving the little community to its usual pursuits and resources. The boats' crews regularly went out to the various stations; 'the look-out' was daily kept on the headland, frequently by Roland and Petrel, either separately or together. Every day of their lives they became closer companions, as they fished or watched for the huge monsters whose favourite haunt appeared to be the bay the noble cliff overlooked. Gradually the cold, stormy weather passed away, the days grew perceptibly longer, and the whales became fewer. One evening,

after more than a week without seeing a whale, Cleeve observed—

‘It will soon be over for the season, but we cannot growl, or the owners either. Nearly everything we have is full of oil, and there is a splendid lot of whalebone. I expect a ship to show up before long, when I will pay off the men. Then Rolly, you will perhaps hear from the banker, and may have to go to Botany Bay to seek your fortune.’

‘Rolly says he is coming back here, dad,’ said Petrel, with a very serious face.

‘So, young people, you have been fixing it up already?’ laughed the giant. ‘Well, we must see what the man of money says. It may be he will want Rolly to go back to England to his friends.’

‘That’s not likely,’ replied the boy; ‘they are more likely to wish me to remain in New South Wales. You know my father intended settling there; but I mean to return here, or perhaps to the new settlement the captain of the *Firefly* said was to be formed on St. Vincent’s Gulf.’

‘All right, Rolly; you wait and hear what your friends in Sydney say first, and then make up your mind.’

In due course the expected ship did arrive, and took away the whole of the produce of the season; but the owner Cleeve hoped to see was not on board, nor were there any letters for Roland from the Sydney banker. This did not surprise the Headman, communication in those days being necessarily slow and the opportunities of intercourse few.

So time passed on; another whaling season had come and gone, and with these hospitable people young Grantley had lived for more than two years. The slight boy, small for his age, had grown up a strong young man. He was not tall, indeed, but his wiry, well-knit form, inured by continual open-air exercise to all kinds of exertion, gave evidence of strength and endurance. The soft, dreamy eyes of boyhood now glowed with buoyant, youthful pride and fire; and the quick, elastic step proclaimed the energy latent in dawning manhood.

Active, daring, and enterprising, what do such as he

require but a fitting field for the development of their talents? and that, surely, broad Australia supplied to every ardent searcher. It was now that his mother's letter became specially impressed upon his mind. It ran as follows:—

‘Brig *Mary*.

‘MY DEAREST SON,—Something tells me I shall never live to reach Australia, and that you will be left alone, a stranger in a strange land—you, a mere child in years and experience. O, what a fate for the scion of one of the oldest families in England! Since your father's death I have never ceased to think of this and what I can do to guide you. I am but a poor weak woman who, with all a mother's love for her boy, is ill qualified to grapple with such a task, and the responsibility is killing me.

‘You know I once hoped you would inherit the Grantley estates and title. It has been the desire of my life, and even now I cling to it, though the prospect appears so remote. Between you and the estates there may, however, be only one frail life; for if Sir Archibald's son dies, I believe he may prefer to break the entail, if possible, and make you his heir rather than either of his other nephews. Never forget this, my boy, and that you are a Grantley, and on your mother's side, too, allied to an ancient race, and that you may be called upon some day to occupy the proud position your ancestors gloriously filled in their day. If not, and you remain a private gentleman, remember your high birth and blood, and hold yourself free from all taint. Without a penny you are equal to the highest in the land; among them only seek your mate. As you love me, Roland, do not marry out of your own caste, or any one that I should not welcome as a daughter. O, my son, you will be thrown among people scarcely a family of whom is free from the foul stigma of low crime. Their daughters will be fair in your young eyes; but beware, beware: do not ruin your prospects by joining your grand old name and race in a vile alliance with a convict's child. I foresee your peril, yet know not how to guard you except by my solemn warning and appeals to that pride which is inherent in you and which I have striven to strengthen. Look upon these as my dying words and injunctions. You will make a name in the new land, even if you are never called upon to sit where your fathers sat in Grantley Hall. Leave it unsullied by connection with what is vulgar and dishonourable. That God may bless and keep you is the prayer of your loving mother,

‘MARGARET GRANTLEY.’



NEWLANDS HEAD & PORPOISE HEAD BEYOND.



SITE OF THE OLD WHALING STATION.





## CHAPTER IX

## OVERLANDING

WITH all sails set before a fair wind, she came round the Bluff right into the cove, and dropped anchor close to the shears. There was no doubt about it, those on board knew where they were coming, or else the brig did herself.

‘The *Lochbar*, with the owners on board,’ pronounced Cleeve at once, and away he went in his whale-boat, the seven oars driving her at her best pace ; curving round the rocks lining the shore they went, keeping perfect time, the long craft looking graceful as a swan as she bounded over the rollers. Then she rounded to and shot alongside the vessel, and the Headman’s tall form could be seen to step on board. Petrel sat down on a rock, looking disconsolately at the brig, while Roland stood over her not much happier, judging from his face.

‘I am quite sure you will be going away in that horrid ship, and perhaps won’t come back any more !’

‘I don’t want to go, Pet, at all, only your father thinks I ought ; but I shall hurry back as soon as possible.’

‘How can you hurry,’ said she in lugubrious tones, ‘when scarcely any ships ever come here ?’ and the tears began to flow. ‘You will soon forget all about me—about all of us—with your fine friends.’

The youth tried to console her, but, truth to tell, he felt ready to cry himself, and had to exercise great self-control to prevent his feelings getting the better of him. However, they managed, as they wandered about together, to comfort each other somehow, so that, when they returned to the station and found several visitors with Cleeve, they were able to meet them quite cheerfully. One was a stout, fair-haired man with a pleasant face and genial smile. He met Petrel at the door.

‘Well, my little seabird, I’ve brought you all sorts of nice things ; but you have become such a woman, I’m afraid

you will think yourself too grown-up for them. And this is your young friend from the wreck of the *Mary*, who is going to Sydney with us, Mr. Cleeve says ? ' said he, shaking hands kindly with Roland. ' Well,' he added with a merry twinkle, ' I will promise to take great care of him for your sake, and return him safe and sound.'

Roland at once felt that he had found a friend in the genial gentleman, though his heart still sank at the thought of leaving.

' A number of us are going,' added his new friend, ' to New South Wales with the intention of bringing cattle over to South Australia to form runs in the country round about here, where the future capital of the colony is to be. Mr. Cleeve thinks it will be a good chance for you to join us. We want some more young fellows ; but we will talk later with you on the subject. Now, Petrel, here are my odds and ends for you : I want to see how you like them.'

And not giving Grantley time to thank him, Mr. Danker devoted himself to the delighted Petrel. There were three other men to whom Roland was now introduced. One, a tall, middle-aged man, was part-owner of the Fishery. The others were only a few years older than himself, both rather over the average height, agreeable and bright in manner. ' My name is James Enfield,' said the elder, ' and this is my chum, Floss Gifford. We have heard your story, and as we are not long arrived from the old country we feel quite friends already, as fellow-countrymen often do when they meet in a strange land, and shall be delighted if you will come with us to Sydney, or Botany Bay, as we somehow nearly always call it.'

' We are going to bring a tent on shore,' said Gifford, ' to camp in while the brig is loading her cargo, with a view of examining the country to find the best land to bring our cattle to. In this you can be of much use to us, as you must know a great deal about it from living here so long.'

This was the very chance Roland wanted, and his heart bounded at the thought that he, too, might bring over cattle

and become a squatter, quite close to Petrel. Quite suddenly his future course seemed to have become clear to him.

In due course the tent was neatly pitched at a short distance among the sandhills of the beach, and Petrel felt half deserted, for her old companion spent much of his time with his new friends, exploring the country in every direction. Laughingly, though half in earnest, they divided it out amongst themselves.

‘Anyhow, there is plenty for all of us,’ they told Petrel, ‘and Roland is to have first choice, as he is the discoverer.’

‘I know he will take the block round here,’ added Floss, ‘because he says he will be able to supply the whaling-station with beef, but I believe he wants you to help him.’

‘Oh, nonsense!’ said Petrel, with a conscious blush; ‘I’ve enough to do to look after dad.’

‘Quite right, my little woman; have nothing to do with the young fellows—stick to the old man,’ interjected the Headman. ‘The *Lockbar* sails in two days, my lads; so it is well that you have picked out your runs.’

‘Yes, it’s all settled,’ replied Enfield; ‘we find that there is really good country about here, and we have quite decided, if we make a successful journey, to bring the stock down the Murray here.’

‘Well, I like the plan,’ answered Cleeve, ‘particularly for Roland. I am told there will be opposition fisheries next season, and more meat will be required, and you should be able to supply it. Now, my little girl, we will go home, as I want a long talk with Rolly.’

This conversation occurred at the tent, where the visitors were entertaining Cleeve, Petrel, and Roland at tea.

Bidding their new friends a cordial good-night, the others turned homewards, and as they walked the Headman acquainted Grantley with the arrangement Mr. Danker was prepared to make with him on behalf of himself and his two young friends. Roland was to put an equal amount with each of the others into a common fund in Sydney for the purchase of stock; they were to pay equal shares of all ex-

penses, and each to do his share of the droving and other work in bringing the cattle over to South Australia, and on arrival to divide them fairly, one-fourth to each individual. 'Mr. Danker says,' he continued, 'that he thinks they are treating you liberally in taking you in on equal terms, now that all arrangements are completed; but he has taken a fancy to you, and is certain that you are made of the right stuff for the undertaking. A letter has just been brought from Adelaide, as the new settlement is called, by a black fellow, for Mr. Danker, from the Sydney banker whom he knows, enclosing one for you. The banker tells him to take you over to him, as he has important news for you. There is no doubt you will get your money all right, and be able to make a good start with these men.'

With tears in his eyes, Roland could only murmur his thanks to the kind-hearted Headman.

'I shall never forget your kindness,' he said; 'what should I have done but for you?'

'We have been very glad to have him, eh, Pet? and shall be as glad to see him back again with a herd of cattle all his own, and riding a fine horse. We will go to meet him, little woman,' cried the big man, picking her up in his great arms, to put an end to a scene during which a lump was rising in his own throat. In his big-hearted guilelessness, did it not strike the father what was growing—that his Pet's heart was no longer all his own? Young, sensitive, and innocent as she was, it was but natural that these two young lives that had been so strangely and so long thrown together should feel a mutual affinity which would grow stronger, on her side at least, when her hero was far away. But her father suspected nothing; and half-woman, half-child as she was, she herself scarcely understood the new-born feeling.

In after years the fond father often reproached himself with blindness; but how could he know, how can parents ever know, when the actors in this world-old tragi-comedy themselves scarcely realise the true state of their feelings till it is too late to prevent it?

All the passengers had to be on board before dark, as the master intended sailing during the evening. The Headman had his boat ready to take off Mr. Danker and Roland, the others having gone earlier. Auntie was outside looking at her goats, when Grantley went into the cottage to say good-bye to Petrel. She was very silent, as he kissed her and turned to go.

‘O Rolly, what ever am I to do without you? But I am not going to cry, but shall look forward to meeting you again.’

Then ‘Auntie’ came in and heartily bade him ‘God speed,’ telling him to grow big and tall ‘like—like a man ought to do,’ the latter part of the sentence being gulped out with a quick jerk, and then she joined Petrel in copious weeping. Then there came a peremptory hail from the boat, to cut short the parting scene; so with a fervent embrace our young friend hurried away, leaving them both in tears. He could see a little white pocket-handkerchief waving a final farewell at the door of the hut, until the brig passed round the Bluff.

We will not linger over the voyage. The wind was fair, the weather fine, and in ten days the *Lochbar* entered that unrivalled scene of beauty, Sydney Harbour. The following morning Mr. Danker accompanied Roland to the bank with the necessary documents. The draft was at once pronounced to be good, and the banker said the cash would be at once placed to the credit of Mr. Grantley.

‘Your aunt and sisters have been writing me respecting you,’ said the banker, ‘and I shall be glad to give them such excellent accounts of your health and prospects. The family lawyer has also communicated with me respecting your father’s property. Everything is in training, but you had better come with me to the agent here, Mr. Carter, to expedite matters.’

For some days much of Roland’s time and attention were occupied in such business, and in writing to his sisters in reference to family affairs and their future movements. By the advice of the banker he appointed Mr. Carter, the attor-

ney, to act for him in winding-up all business matters under his father's will, and to communicate with him, as occasion required, by letter.

Meantime Mr. Danker had arranged for the purchase of a thousand head of mixed cattle near Queanbeyan on favourable terms. As the herd was undoubtedly one of the best in New South Wales, there was little question that they would be approved of when inspected ; and delivery was certain to be quickly made and the transaction completed to the satisfaction of all parties.

'The owners, Messrs. Roby and Broon, are first-class business men,' said their agent, Mr. Tilus, 'and will put the thousand head together before you can say "Jack Robinson."'

'They can't be too expeditious when we are once on the run, and we won't be behind time,' replied Mr. Danker—'you may assure them of that.'

Nothing remained to do but obtain the necessary outfit. A number of riding animals of the stock-horse kind, a couple of not too heavy draught horses, and a spring-cart, were picked up at various sale-yards, after several days had been spent in bargaining and trying. The unanimously appointed leader of the expedition, Mr. Danker, was in his proper element when buying or selling stock of all kinds, but particularly horses ; and on this occasion the whole of the responsibility rested upon him, as his young companions were inexperienced in the art that pertains to dealing in horse-flesh.

'Though it may look like blowing my own trumpet, which, allow me to observe, is foreign to my retiring disposition,' observed that gentleman, as he cast a critical, approving eye over the animals and vehicle before him, 'I consider that outfit about perfect, bearing in mind what we had to select from.'

Supplies of stores and cooking utensils were obtained for the journey. Last of all, much care was bestowed in purchasing suitable fire-arms and ammunition, as the safety of the party might depend on their means of defence against the blacks, who were known to be numerous on some parts of the route. They hoped also thus to be able to provide the ex-

pedition with game, and so eke out the provisions taken with them. 'We won't buy the bullock-team till we reach Goulburn,' said Mr. Danker, 'or engage men; we shall probably find more experienced bushmen there, recommended by known employers.'

This was agreed to, and, all business being completed in Sydney, one bright morning the party in the highest spirits began their long journey of a thousand miles, nearly all the way through unknown country. On arriving at the rising township of Goulburn, they were fortunate in quickly finding a fine team of bullocks and a strong dray as good as new at a reasonable price. The driver was also willing to join the party, and was recommended as a most efficient bush-man.

'In fact, you can't put him wrong,' said the auctioneer; 'his only fault is the bottle, and I expect there are not many grog-shops on the track you are taking.'

'Not a drop of liquor from the day we leave your settlements till we reach the other side; and we take none with us,' answered Mr. Danker.

'He's your man, then; only, don't ask him any questions as to who or what he is, and he will perform his part of the contract, if it is to drive that team to kingdom come. "Tom the bullock-puncher" is his name; take my advice and leave it at that. He doesn't want any agreement, and wouldn't sign one.'

Tom was a big but wiry fellow, with a round, stolid face. When asked if he would form one of the party, he readily assented, after giving one deliberate glance at its different members.

'It's not a pleasure-trip, gents,' he remarked; 'but I suppose you know all that, and where you go the teams shall follow, as long as you find me in bullock-hide.' This was evidently a big conversational effort for the Puncher, as nothing more was heard from him in reference to the subject. He immediately devoted his entire attention to a complete overhaul of the dray and appointments; nothing escaped his notice, and it was obvious that in Tom the expedition had

a man who thoroughly understood his work and meant to do it. Full supplies having been laid in, the party proceeded to Goondabool, where they found preparations were being made for mustering the cattle. Those were the days when entire herds were collected into large receiving-yards, and then passed through series of smaller pens to divide them as required. Later this dangerous, laborious, and often cruel system was generally abandoned for 'cutting out' with trained horses on open camps, a much safer and quicker way, and also less injurious to the cattle.

At Goondabool putting the thousand head of grown cattle together was a slow process, and nearly a month elapsed before the final delivery was made. Then fairly commenced the long, tedious journey, when the mob had to be grazed slowly along some eight to ten miles a day, and watched during the night. The river Murrumbidgee was struck at Gundagai, and followed to its junction with the Lachlan, where they were compelled to branch off, so as to cross the latter river above the wide delta of swamps at its mouth.

Thus far the trip had been most successful and even enjoyable. The season was good, and the winding banks of the beautiful river, which was in moderate flood, were covered with splendid grass and luxuriant verdure. The magnificent timber-trees which fringed the banks were a perpetual delight to the travellers, as they lounged under them during the long midday camps, when the days were too hot for the herd to move along. Of natives little had been seen, and they seemed to be keeping out of sight of the party. At first the country was fairly wooded, part of it even densely so; but further on immense plains stretched down to the river from the far horizon.

On the bank of the Lachlan they were confronted with their first real difficulty. They had to cross the river without a boat, and the supplies must be got over dry. The cart had the wheels and shafts taken off, and a couple of kegs lashed outside to prevent its sinking, thus forming a kind of punt, that answered the purpose fairly well. Several of the men



were good swimmers, and they soon had a rope stretched across by which the punt, loaded with stores, was easily passed backwards and forwards, until all was got over. The cattle gave little trouble, the stream being narrow and the weather warm. A few were cut off from the mob, and kept until the working bullocks were forced over; they were then brought up, and immediately followed. Indeed, it rarely happens that, once started, there is any trouble, if the drovers understand their business. On this occasion the whole thousand head took to the water in rapid succession, and to a beast were landed on the opposite bank in safety. Swimming the horses was an easy matter, and lastly came the bullock-dray. With that, as soon as it was discovered that the bed of the river at the crossing-place was free from logs, little trouble was taken. A rope made fast to the axle was carried over the stream, the bullock-team was attached to this, and the ponderous vehicle dragged across in a few minutes.

During the whole of this difficult and, to most of the party, novel experience, Tom the Puncher had been of the greatest service. Nothing appeared strange to him: crossing cattle, horses, drays, or stores were matters with which he was evidently quite familiar.

‘Well, Tom,’ said Mr. Danker, when the work was over that night, ‘I am an old whaler myself, and fancy that I have had a diversified experience of bush life into the bargain, but I never met a man better up to his work than you.’

‘Ay, sir, the Lachlan is not the first river I have crossed,’ and the Puncher turned away to do something, as if he thought enough had been said.

This reticence was habitual with the man; his knowledge was always at the service of his employers, but he never dropped a hint how or where it had been acquired. No doubt he could have told a tale of crime, oppression, wrong, and hardship, committed or endured at the expense of all that rendered life bright and happy. Like many of his kind, his was a past that would bear no retrospection.

## CHAPTER X

## A BRUSH WITH THE BLACKS

HITHERTO scarcely a black had been seen, but on approaching the junction of the Murrumbidgee with the Murray many signs of their presence were observed, rather disquieting to the leader, who now impressed upon his party the importance of great caution. No hostilities, however, were attempted for some days, and the expedition at length reached the Murray, which, like the other rivers they had passed, was in half-flood.

'I am afraid we are going to have trouble with these black devils before long,' observed Mr. Danker anxiously one morning. 'Look at the different smokes in front and behind us.'

Just then Roland rode up to report that some spears had been thrown out of a thicket at a passing heifer, as the cattle were trailing on to the plain they were camped near. They would not have been noticed had it not been for the rush of the herd. On riding quickly up with a stockman to ascertain what was the matter, three or four black fellows ran for the river and plunged in. The cow was wounded in three places, one spear still sticking in her.

'An ugly tale, too, my boy,' answered Danker, 'as it is probably the beginning of worse attempts; but come along, we will see what can be done, and get the spear out of the heifer anyhow.'

This was comparatively easy; and, as none of the injuries were likely to kill the animal, the matter was not serious except as an indication of what might be expected.

'She is worth a good many dead ones yet,' said Enfield, who was a bit of a vet., 'and if the beggars can't hit harder than that, and will only pick out those with thick hides, we shall do.'

'We must keep not only ourselves but the mob out of the timber as much as possible,' rejoined the leader; 'luckily, there are plenty of plains here, and I believe they continue a long way.'

'Sturt in his *Journal* says the blacks are numerous about the Darling junction,' observed Floss quietly. 'We had better be prepared to fight, don't you think, boss?'

'Not a shadow of a doubt about that,' said Danker; 'but let us do all we can to avoid it by keeping the black dogs at a distance. I don't want to kill any of them; but when it comes to a question of going under myself, or even losing our property, I'll shoot as often and as straight as I can.'

'And what about our going under? that does not appear to enter into your calculations,' plaintively inquired Floss.

A laugh followed this sally.

'You will take care of your own skin, I fancy,' retorted the other, 'as doubtless we all shall, and of each other as well; and to do this the easier we must keep the whole party, with cattle, horses, and drays, as close together as possible, and in open country. The darkies will never attack us without cover, or if they do they will repent it.'

After this, great care and watchfulness were exercised until they arrived on the Darling, which was then running nearly level with its banks—a broad, strong river that the first glance showed would take some crossing. There was a nearly clear open space right on the spot where they proposed passing over, and here the camp was formed, the leader feeling satisfied with the safety of the position. That night it was arranged that the stock should the next day feed back on the plain, while, with the cart again metamorphosed into a boat, some of the party should transport the heavy articles and stores, after the dray had been floated across by attaching the kegs to it.

The night passed tranquilly, and when breakfast was finished preparations were at once begun for crossing.

'The first thing to be done is for you crack swimmers to amuse yourselves and have a prolonged bath at the same time by getting a rope over,' said Mr. Danker. 'This stream is not a mere Lachlan; so, that there may be no bother, we will make the end fast to this keg and swing it in for you to push before you.'

This was quickly done, though the strong current forced them a good bit down stream. After this, the work of transporting went on merrily, and early in the evening they were ready for the cattle ; as, however, they could not depend on their taking so formidable a stream without much trouble, it was decided to defer the attempt until the following morning, when the whole day would be before them.

While riding out in the evening to bring the cattle into camp, Roland and Floss noticed how many trees had sheets of bark stripped off recently, evidently for canoes.

‘ And, by Jove, there they are ! ’ exclaimed the latter, ‘ on the other side of the river, coming round the bend, three of them full of black fellows.’

It was obvious the whites were also seen, for there was a considerable commotion among the natives, and much brandishing of weapons, combined with hostile gestures.

‘ I believe they are all men,’ said Roland ; ‘ that means war, doesn’t it, Floss ? ’

‘ That ’s about the interpretation we must put upon these demonstrations, if all the tales told of the beggars are true. Hope they will let us cross the Darling, anyhow. It would not be pleasant to have them buzzing around when the cattle are just heading well over. See the enemy, Danker ? ’ he added, as that worthy rode up ; ‘ there they go gaily down the broad bosom of the Murray after hurling defiance at us.’

The face of the elder man grew serious as he watched the savages disappear round a point.

‘ I don’t like the aspect of things,’ he answered reflectively ; ‘ it seems as if they were collecting to oppose us lower down. Let us put the mob in camp, though it is a bit early, and make all snug for the night. Two hands will have to sleep over the river with the goods already crossed, as a guard in case of attempted thieving, though they are hardly likely to try that.’

He was right. Morning broke without any disturbance occurring. No time was now lost in sending the remainder of the equipage over the river. Then the cart-horses and spare riding-hacks were swum across and a stockman sent

to keep the leading cattle in check as they landed. The herd had been kept in readiness, and was now drawn up towards the stream with the working bullocks a little in advance. At a given word they were put at the water and forced in by cracking whips and cutting at them. At first they circled round trying hard to return in spite of the rain of blows ; then one made for the opposite bank, and the others followed. At a run the leading cattle were brought up and rushed at the river by every available horseman. Bravo ! the leaders see the workers just landing and take it splendidly, and presently there is a forest of horns from side to side of the broad Darling.

When cattle once take to a stream, a little attention will keep them going until the whole are over ; all that is required is to keep the living string unbroken by urging on the tail, each horseman closing in upon the last beast and forcing them forward. As the last reluctant stragglers were compelled to follow the rest, the members of the party, with smiling faces, congratulated themselves on the successful passage of the big river, as they well might, for it was no slight undertaking for men who had seen little of this kind of work before.

‘ We are not quite out of the wood, or rather over the water, yet,’ said Danker, ‘ as we have the Anabanch still in front, but I expect we shall be able to ford that. It’s only ten or twenty miles away, so we will load up and crawl on a short distance to-day, and probably reach it to-morrow.’

Being still apprehensive of the natives, when they moved forward they kept as much as possible out of the timber lining the river and in the open country. The next day a belt of trees could be distinguished, apparently fringing a stream directly before them and flowing into the Murray.

‘ Ride on, Floss,’ said Enfield, ‘ and tell us what it means, and look out that the noble savage does not deprive us of your invaluable services.’

‘ I’ll be wily as the warrior of these wilds himself, and not alone out of consideration for your feelings,’ replied Gifford as he rode off.

In an hour he returned to report a broad river three miles in front, obviously too deep to ford.

'There is a good deal of timber, box, and gum, growing in it,' said he, 'showing that it is high now, as they must be out of the water sometimes. Two canoes are on the other side; I did not see the owners, but they might be close by, as there are plenty of bushes to skulk in.'

'Our scout brings back a disquieting tale, Rolly; a big river to cross, defended by aboriginal men-of-war. Perhaps it is only a backwater.'

'No,' said Floss, 'there is too strong a current for that; you may depend on it, we shall have to swim it, niggers in front or not.'

'Well, it's the last, if explorers are to be relied upon,' observed Roland; 'that's one comfort.'

'I agree with you, Rolly,' replied Enfield; 'my ideal droving is along a track following a river whose bends form natural camps, where one can dispense with watching—not this perpetual swimming of raging torrents. I'm sure the cattle are of the same opinion; they have only just settled down after the Darling, and now here is Gifford's Mississippi or something equally formidable to ford.'

'There is the camp under those trees,' answered Roland; 'the teams are turned out, so we shall go no further to-night.'

'Then I'll leave you fellows to yourselves for a bit and report to the chief,' said Floss; 'possibly he may wish to go on and look out for a crossing.'

'And I hope he may find one not more than three feet deep, with no native war-vessels or warriors to molest peaceful pioneers,' said Enfield as he went off. 'Like yours, Rolly, my boy, my experience of the niggers is not a pleasant one. They are very useful when got well under; but while that process is going on, the Lord deliver me out of their hands. And, as a matter of fact, that process of getting them well under is going on fast. Look at Van Diemen's Land and New South Wales; even at Port Philip they are being taught the same lesson, and I believe the poor devils are instinctively

conscious of what they have to expect all over the country. We are a fine go-ahead people, no doubt—too go-ahead for such as these to come in contact with and hope to survive.'

'I shan't forget that scene on the Coorong very soon,' replied Roland; 'we had done them no harm, yet see how they treated us.'

'Even so,' said the other sadly; 'and it always will be so where we enter savage people's territory. However, I don't wonder that you feel a bit bloodthirsty. We will gather the mob into camp, and hope that we may never be obliged to take an active part in the getting-under process. I'd prefer leaving that to others, if possible.'

Grantley did not pursue the subject; but he thought of his friend the captain and the people of the *Mary*, and the possibility crossed his mind that some day he might be thrown in contact with that tribe. If so, he would like them to recognise him, that they might know who wreaked a fitting vengeance.

Mr. Danker had gone to examine the stream ahead with Floss, as the latter had expected. After following it up for some distance, he, too, came to the conclusion that no ford existed.

'There's nothing for it but swimming as we did with the others,' he said on their return. 'There's a lot of nasty floating weeds in some places, thick enough to drown anything from man to bullock that gets entangled in it. These we must try to clear away. We noticed it by wading across a backwater, and our horses could hardly push their way through. In deep water they would have drowned.'

'We will clear our path with our splendid specimen of marine architecture,' observed Enfield; 'the punt is admirably adapted not to glide through such impediments; she will either stay with it or drag all after, according to the amount of power we can apply.'

Before noon next day they arrived at the Anabranche, where it was at once obvious that they could not do more than cross the stores and dray, leaving the cattle until the following morning. The middle of the stream where the

current ran was clear, but on either side a mass of a kind of rope-weed floated on the surface of the water, the tendrils of which were many feet long and extremely strong. A few experiments proved that without great risk of drowning many they could not swim the cattle over until it was cleared away. The cart, again made into a punt, was the only means of removing the obstacle, and by its use a sufficient passage was opened for swimming the herd across. The whole of the day was occupied in this manner, but as evening approached everything was in readiness for pushing across the next morning. Several fires had been observed some miles down the river, and the forms of a few blacks were occasionally seen, apparently watching from a distance what was going on.

'We shall certainly have a brush with these gentry yet,' said Mr. Danker. 'I shall not be surprised if it is before we get out of this place.'

The words had scarcely left his lips when the cattle were seen madly rushing back down stream.

'Maybe only the ordinary fright at a bird,' observed Floss, when suddenly a pistol-shot rang out, followed by another and yet another. The leader sprang on his horse.

'Come with me, Gifford; you fellows be on the watch here,' he shouted as he galloped off in the direction of the reports.

A few moments brought him to Enfield, Roland, and a stockman, sitting on their horses looking at a cow with some half-dozen spears sticking deeply in her side.

'Gifford, you and Jem steady the herd; the brutes will run to the Darling if they're not stopped. Now, Enfield, how did this happen?'

'The outer wing,' answered Enfield coolly, 'had just drawn down to drink through these lignum bushes, when back they came at a tearing pace. We all galloped up, and were met by a score of spears and boomerangs, thrown by as many black demons. Rolly had a spear through his shirt, Jem got a clip from a waddy on the shoulder, and a boomerang took my hat off; thank heaven it wasn't my head!



THE WHALING  
COVE



PHOTO: S. A. GOVT.



Worst of all, a spear entered my horse's thigh. We all blazed away, and one blackbird was winged, if not more. They did not stop for another volley, but took to the water like so many ducks.'

The cow was now dead, and Mr. Danker dismounted and drew the spears from her. Four were formidable barbed weapons quite eight feet long.

'If I had the choice, I would rather have a bayonet in me than that,' said Enfield; 'it's emphatically a barbarous-looking instrument, enough to make any civilised fighter shudder.'

'I hope you will never have either,' replied the chief. 'It's bad enough to see our property subjected to such devils' tools. Perhaps it is as well she did get them, or some of you might. Again I say, you cannot be too careful, particularly when entering scrub.'

Paul Danker rode back to the camp, musing deeply; and, after relating what had happened, he added—

'There is no doubt we must exercise much care, or we shall experience trouble with these black wretches. The fire-arms had better be kept loaded and ready to hand, both when travelling and camping. As soon as we are over this river we will make long stages until we are through the dangerous country. In a hundred miles, or perhaps fifty, we can leave this tribe behind.'

'Lend me the big duck-gun, boss,' said the Puncher. 'I'll carry it convenient on the dray, and give a good account of them if necessary.'

'Right, Tom, I don't doubt you; load it with buckshot, and, if they seem to mean mischief, fire when they are seventy or eighty yards off; there's nothing like peppering them with shot; it's more effective than ball and more merciful too, and God knows I don't want the lives of any of them.'

Everything was carefully arranged for the night, all bushes being cut down so as to leave no cover under shelter of which the camp could be approached. As an additional precaution all hands were to be called before daylight, as that is the time

the Australian aborigine generally chooses to make his most serious attacks.

Next morning, when discussing this Mr. Danker said—

‘They may set on us at any hour, as a good deal depends upon our position. If there is a gorge or thickly wooded place through which we are obliged to pass, they will probably wait till we reach it. If they can’t catch us in that way, I expect they will attack at peep of daylight. So, for a while, we will have a double number of men on watch, and all hands must sleep in their clothes.’

The cattle were allowed to draw back on to the plain to feed while the stores were passed over. Then they were brought up in the same way as at the Darling, the working bullocks leading. At first all went excellently; then there was an unaccountable check, and when in mid-stream those in front turned back, with the result that they became a circling, whirling ring of struggling brutes, those in the centre being forced under water by those on the outside climbing on them. There was nothing for it but to prevent others entering and try and break the ring. Presently it did separate; a few went over to the opposite side, the greater number returned to the main mob, while half-drowned animals kept bobbing up and down the current. Of these, several were caught in the weeds, which they with difficulty struggled through; others were only saved by the punt being taken out with ropes to them, by which means they were pulled free.

‘This is too dangerous a place to go hap-hazard at,’ said Mr. Danker. ‘Floss, you and Tom go over in the punt and send the workers back. Take your saddle and catch one of the spare horses we will send across when the bullocks are here, and collect the straggling cattle opposite the crossing; they will help to draw the mob over.’

His orders were promptly executed. The Puncher’s long whip soon sent the team back, and Tom followed in the punt, while Gifford drove those of the herd that had crossed to the landing to attract the main mob. Once more they were

formed and brought up at a run, this time with perfect success, the leaders keeping a straight line ; and in a short time all were safely on the right side, to the joy and relief of the owners.

‘To-morrow we will push along,’ said the leader, ‘as already decided, in hopes of leaving the black fellows in the rear ; but to-day we must stay where we are.’

‘There are many smokes down the Murray,’ replied Floss. ‘I could see them from the rising ground.’

‘The more reason to get away from them by moving quickly,’ was the rejoinder.

For the next two days all went smoothly, and considerable progress was made. They had kept almost entirely away from the river, watering the cattle at backwaters and lagoons, and already the vigilance of each member of the party was becoming a little relaxed.

‘According to my map,’ said Mr. Danker, ‘at the midday camp we are within a short distance of Lake Victoria and the Rufus, which supplies it from the Murray. Shall we go round the lake or cross the stream ? Perhaps I had better ride ahead and look with one of you.’

This was agreed upon, and accompanied by Roland he set off. A couple of hours brought them to the lake, a splendid sheet of water stretching ten or twelve miles out back.

‘I don’t relish the idea of circling that expanse,’ said Danker ; ‘suppose we have a glance at the Rufus ; we don’t see any smokes ; perhaps the darkies are left behind us at last.’

‘It seems a pity to go all round the lake if we can avoid it,’ answered young Grantley.

Accordingly they continued on through a gum and box-covered flat interspersed with polygonum bushes until they struck the bank of a broad creek, which was no doubt the Rufus, as the current was running strong into the lake.

‘Not much after the Darling and Anabranck,’ observed Danker ; ‘shall we try it and save going round ?’

‘By all means,’ said Roland.

‘ Well, we will hear what the others say, but I am not sure it is wise. The grass is certainly splendid—that is one inducement ; and the country abutting on the lake looks heavy for the drays.’

After discussing the matter, the party unanimously decided to cross the stream in preference to going round the great sheet of water. That night they arrived near it, in timber, the whole of the country thereabouts being wooded. No signs of blacks had been observed for forty-eight hours, and there appeared every reason to suppose that none were near. Nevertheless, the fire-arms were kept loaded and in readiness for the worst.

‘ I am in the morning watch,’ said Mr. Danker, ‘ and I shall call all hands by daylight so as to make an early start at the crossing ; so you fellows may as well sleep with one eye open.’

‘ The boss is fidgety to-night,’ Floss observed to Grantley when they met on their rounds afterwards ; ‘ and I don’t quite wonder, for I have had a few brushes with the niggers on the Sydney side, and this is just the sort of place they select for their night attacks. Cover everywhere and a river to dive in when things become too warm for them. You see, they know our horses are little advantage to us then.’

The cattle were restless, and this prevented further conversation ; but Roland too began to wish they had taken the longer, safer road by the head of the lake.

‘ Be prepared at a moment’s notice,’ said the leader when going on watch. ‘ I don’t fancy our position over much in all this brushwood, so there is the more necessity to be careful.’

‘ The mob has been very unsettled,’ replied Floss, ‘ but has now quieted down. We shall look alive directly you call. I can’t say the camp is a pleasant one under the circumstances,’ and down went the speaker into his blankets to forget his misgivings in the sound sleep of youth and health.

It seemed to him that he had just closed his eyes, and the dream he was busy about had scarcely developed into the interesting stage, when the words ‘ Daylight breaking ’ in Danker’s well-known tones sounded in his ears.

‘What’s the matter with the mob?’ he cried, as the thunderous sound of a large number of frightened cattle in rapid motion broke on the silence. Before there was time to answer, the whole herd was off with a mad rush for the open country, horns and hoofs clashing, and trees and bushes torn up and levelled as they swept away.

‘The blacks, by heaven!’ shouted Danker; ‘but for the cattle they would have surprised us. Stand to it, men; they mean mischief this time.’

The drays gave the whites cover, of which they promptly availed themselves. The blacks, gesticulating, yelling, and dancing, as is their practice in battle, were now distinctly seen only a few hundred yards away. Painted in their grotesque fashion with alternate stripes of red and white and ornamented with feathers, they looked devils incarnate in the misty morning light.

‘Fire a few shots over their heads,’ said Danker; ‘perhaps it may intimidate them and save life.’

Not a bit of it; they laughed in derisive glee and contempt as they came on with poised spears and brandished boomerangs and waddies, scarcely troubling to take advantage of the cover of the bushes in their scorn of the white man.

The overlanders as yet had held their fire, watching the black warriors, two to three hundred in number, coming on in a fairly steady line some three deep.

‘It’s no use delaying any longer; we must shoot,’ said Danker, as he gave the signal by discharging his own rifle. Four or five dropped at the first volley, but most of the others still advanced, encouraged by a tall, splendidly made fellow profusely ornamented, flinging showers of their weapons before them as they came. Again the whites fired, and again several fell or retired badly hit. They now sought shelter in the bushes and behind trees, apparently preparing for a rush.

‘I’ll give them both barrels this time,’ said Tom, and he did.

When they again advanced there was a wild yell, and they literally seemed to melt away. The scattering shot of

the big duck-gun had wounded so many, that a regular panic ensued. A few shots were still fired at flying figures, as they flashed past through the trees and into the river, more to accelerate their flight than to kill; but the fight was over. Then the victors turned to see whether any among themselves were killed or injured, and were greatly relieved to find that no one was seriously hurt. There were three spear-wounds—one through Enfield's left arm, another in Jem the stockman's hand, and a graze on Danker's side. Besides these, several contusions from partially spent waddies and boomerangs had been received. They all made little of their wounds. Enfield's was the worst, though the spear that had inflicted it was only a light one and fortunately not barbed.

'I don't think it's any worse than some of the bruises you fellows have got,' he said, 'and luckily it isn't my right wing.'

The leader had had a very narrow escape; the spear, a heavy barbed one over eight feet long, having passed through his clothes and actually grazed his side, while it had been thrown with such force that he was carried clean off his feet and pinned to the ground.

'Another inch or two, and I expect it would have been all up with your humble servant,' he quietly remarked, when relieved from his unpleasant position. 'I think I'll keep that weapon to hang in the hall I mean to own yet in Australia, when the natives cease from troubling and the squatter is at rest.'

## CHAPTER XI

### NATIVE OBSEQUIES

IN Australian bush life the most exciting events are not allowed to interfere with the business of the hour. Almost directly after the fight was over, the horses were brought up, while breakfast was in preparation. Floss and Grantley mounted immediately and started to collect the cattle, now



to be seen feeding quietly round the lake, with instructions to allow them to continue on.

‘It’s not worth while bringing them back now they have such a start,’ decided Mr. Danker; ‘we’ll go round and leave the black fellows the victors in that respect; I fancy they have had a lesson they will remember. Not a single dead one about, do you say, Tom? That doesn’t speak much for our shooting, eh?’

‘They carried them off as they fell, boss,’ replied the Puncher. ‘I saw them taking them to the creek where they tied their canoes.’

‘No doubt that was the way they sneaked up, and as an old bushman I ought to have known better than to allow myself to be caught in such a trap; I do believe they would have done for some of us if it hadn’t been for your big double-barrel, Tom. That last fusillade settled them.’

‘I am inclined to think,’ said Enfield philosophically, ‘that a liberal discharge of swan-shot scattered over our bare hides would damp our ardour for combat even more than an occasional fatal bullet. It seemed to blind half the poor wretches. That plucky beggar who was leading was certainly blinded, for they had to lead him away.’

‘There is no mistake about their pluck,’ said Danker; ‘but they don’t understand that their only chance against our powder and ball is to come to close quarters at once. It’s fortunate that it is so, for we should fare badly at close quarters with their spears, boomerangs and waddies. They fight us as they have been accustomed to fight each other, which is within fair range for our fire-arms.’

‘Which all proves,’ replied Enfield, ‘that but for our gunpowder we should find civilising the Australian savage, or say Australia, attended with greater difficulties than we usually realise.’

‘Not a doubt of it. But breakfast is over; yoke up, boys, and let us get out of this. We have all had enough of the Rufus blacks.’

Before leaving a spot they would all remember to their

dying day, a final search was made for any dead or wounded natives ; but it was quite in vain, and it was evident that during the combat they had been carried off. There was, indeed, a plain track to the edge of the stream marked with blood ; there, no doubt, canoes took those away who were dead or too badly injured to swim. This track led through thick bushes from the battle-ground, and was obviously the way by which the savages had approached the camp. It was well known, even in those early days, that the aborigines never left their dead or wounded on a battlefield, if there was a possibility of removing them. Their invariable custom is, as soon as a man fails, to take him beyond the reach of the enemy. So universal is this rule, that in conflicts between hostile tribes the fall of one or two warriors nearly always ends or suspends the struggle, the friends of the dead or injured retiring with them. Most of the combats among themselves appear to take place after open declarations of war and an exchange of mutual defiances sent by messengers or heralds, probably days or even weeks before the parties meet. Towards the whites, their procedure was always the reverse ; they soon recognised their weakness and the necessity of taking every advantage that secrecy and surprise could give them. For this reason, the first break of day was chosen, when the white man was known to be usually asleep and off his guard. I am not prepared to assert that they never attacked a coloured enemy without fair warning—that would be a Quixotism an aboriginal warrior would have laughed to scorn even in the palmiest day of his pride and power, before he became contaminated and demoralised, as he indisputably has been, by his white brother ; but the European he placed in the category of the animals he thought it his duty to destroy in any and every way. In his eyes the white man was the personification of ruthless, all-absorbing power ; never satisfied without the whole of the country ; before whom his people absolutely withered away, even when not actively ill-treated, as was too frequently the case.

Under the most favourable circumstances for the aborigine,

the stranger took complete possession of his country and destroyed his game, thus compelling him to depend largely on the intruder for subsistence, or driving him back upon hostile tribes. This engendered the bitterest hate, though it might be masked under the most abject subserviency. The process began with the coast-tribes, and has continued throughout the whole of inhabited Australia. From the first colonisation to the present time, no adequate reserves have ever been set aside for the unfortunate people whom we have dispossessed and all but annihilated. This is a black indictment to make, but the sting is in its truth. Those who have seen the process must unhesitatingly though reluctantly admit that the darkest stain on Australia's fair fame is her treatment of the aboriginal race. We found them a happy, healthy people; and wherever we have come in contact with them, in less than fifty years we have civilised them off the face of the land, or such a miserable remnant is left that it were a mercy if it had gone too.

Well might the tribe at the Rufus raise the wild lament over their slain in the fatal combat on its banks. It was for them the beginning of the end, the first real trial of strength, in which they learned how little their numbers, courage, and skill could, with their primitive weapons, avail against the stranger's powder and ball. Well may they believe him to be 'the son of the lightning,' the very Evil One himself. But not yet, though humbled, do they acknowledge him as master; once more they will measure their force against his before sinking into the subjection and ruin that await them.

We will not linger with our party of overlanders. The journey ended without any further adventures worthy of mention, and in about six weeks after the encounter with the Rufus blacks they arrived at Encounter Bay. At that period, such an expedition was considered quite an event, and the introduction of such a large number of cattle was of the utmost importance to the young colony, then only recently proclaimed.

The mob was equally divided, Mr. Danker taking his

portion to a station he formed near Rapid Bay, while Enfield and Gifford moved to the creek near Lake Alexandrina, and Grantley settled at Encounter Bay as had been previously arranged. Tom the Puncher accompanied Mr. Danker, driving his beloved bullock-team with him. He had attached himself to the leader in a silent, undemonstrative way that seemed to touch the bluff, kind-hearted man.

‘I’ll take the team as part of my share,’ he said, ‘and Tom with it’; so that was settled.

Jem the Stockman was the only hand Roland took with him, as he knew that he would receive any other assistance he required from his friends at the Fishery. It was with a joy he had not felt for many a day that he rode up to the station. It looked just the same as when he started: the huts, the boathouse with the sloping platform from it to the sea, the flag-staff on the Bluff—he took them all in and welcomed them. There were even the remains of several unfortunate whales on the beach, showing that the season had begun propitiously. Presently, however, best of all the pictures that were treasured in his memory, the light, graceful form he was longing to see came flying towards him.

‘O Rolly, Rolly!’ she cried breathlessly, between smiles and tears, ‘what a man you have grown, and what a long time you have been away.’

They gazed into each other’s eyes with all the mutual admiration that our first parents no doubt felt and showed when first they met in the days of primeval innocence.

‘And you, a little woman, are more changed than I thought possible; I left a child, I find a woman.’

There was, perhaps, not much in the words, but the tones were low and caressing, and the girl coloured with delight. Auntie now came out, and fairly beamed upon the returned hero.

‘Come and have something to eat,’ she insisted. ‘I expect you have been starved “bushing” it so long’; and she made him sit down to the same old hot cakes he remembered so well.

‘Dad is coming,’ cried Petrel; ‘the blacks told us yester-

day that a big mob of cattle were behind the Nob, and he said it must be you, so he only went to Granite Island and is to be back here to dinner to meet you. Dear old dad ! how glad he will be ! ’

And he was, too, for when Roland met him at the landing he sprang out of the boat and almost hugged him. Jack the Harpooner raised a cheer in which all the men heartily joined, so glad were they to see again the boy who had come among them so strangely. The Headman looked the picture of happiness as he walked to the cottage with the young people on either side of him.

‘ And those are all your cattle, are they,’ he asked, ‘ that I saw crossing the Inman ? By-the-by, some sections of land have been surveyed by the party whose tents are pitched on the rise ; you had better take them up, and we will help to form your station ; I’ve got the very man to do it here waiting for you.’

‘ That is fortunate,’ said Roland. ‘ I knew you would do what you could, but, the whaling season being on, I was afraid there would be no one to spare.’

‘ This is a young fellow who has only turned up the last few days, and he has already been looking out timber to build your house with. You shall see him. His name is Jabez Darkenby, which we have shortened to “ Darkie.” ’

An hour later Grantley was introduced to a tall, broad-shouldered young man who was watching his horse cropping the grass near the beach. Each looked attentively at the other, evidently finding something to attract his regard. The stranger was dark to swarthy, with an open, good-tempered countenance ever changing in expression. The eyes were clear and shifting but still bold. The features were all good and even attractive, though the whole face failed to give the impression of strength of purpose. Its varying expression in itself gave the idea of irresolution ; and yet, when the splendid physique was noticed, it was impossible to do other than acknowledge that here was a man capable of performing more than ordinary deeds.

The stranger, on the other hand, thought, as he gazed on the handsome stripling—

‘Not only good-looking but plucky ; the very man for me !’

‘I am very glad to meet you, Mr. Grantley,’ he said. ‘I have heard much of you, from the people here, during the past week. Mr. Cleeve tells me you will require a hut and stockyard built ; I am looking for employment, and will be glad to do it.’

‘What about remuneration ?’ asked Roland, who saw at once that here was a man with a history.

‘If you are agreeable, we will leave that until we are better acquainted,’ said the stranger. ‘Meanwhile, will you allow me to take your horse and relieve you of the cattle for the remainder of the day ? I am a bit of a stockman among other things.’

‘I shall be very glad,’ said Roland, ‘and so will Jem out there ; we’ve been close to their tails for some time now.’

The stranger, with a cheery laugh, mounted and rode off, evidently in his element.

‘I like that fellow,’ said Grantley to the Headman. ‘He must be accustomed to stock from the way he talks.’

The big man did not reply, and the speaker understood that it was better to ask no questions, as was generally the case with new arrivals among the whalers.

From that day a friendship sprang up between the young squatter and the unknown. The latter was at once so useful and so agreeable. Nothing came amiss to him. He felled the timber for the modest house, and in an incredibly short time erected and roofed it in. Then the stockyard was put up, with the assistance of Roland and the stockman, but entirely under his supervision. There was even an attempt at a garden. Milk and butter became regular articles of diet, and the cottage assumed an air of comfort that Grantley heartily attributed to the untiring exertions of the stranger, of whom he still knew nothing.

‘I am a Bohemian,’ said Darkie one evening when they were smoking the last pipe for the night. ‘I have always

been a ne'er-do-well and always shall be. Men of my class may be of some use for a short time, while their love of change will allow them to be contented, as I may to you ; but they never do any good for themselves.'

Petrel, strange to say, always distrusted and even disliked him ; yet he was invariably respectful, though distant, in his demeanour to her. When Roland came alone, she was the same kind, open, trustful, and affectionate girl she had ever been, and always ran out to meet him with the old free, cordial manner ; but when he was accompanied by Darkie she remained in the cottage.

Grantley had been to Adelaide, the declared site of the future capital and seat of the new Government, to purchase the sections on which his building stood and also a few adjoining.

'I am a South Australian landed proprietor now,' he said gaily to Petrel when he returned. 'You must come and look at my estate. It will look all the better when you are there, little woman.'

He meant nothing, but she blushed at her own natural interpretation of his words, and said she would ask dad to take her soon. It must not be inferred from this that she had not seen her lover's property, for in his company she had ridden over the country in all directions and walked over much of it. Hunting, shooting, fishing, they had been inseparable companions, but she had not been as yet inside the house ; that was left until her father could be present.

During this period of his life Grantley had many opportunities of becoming acquainted with the manners and customs of the natives. As hewers of wood and drawers of water, as stockmen and shepherds, they had already become invaluable to the English settlers. And later they reaped the ripe wheat when white labour was so scarce that the crops must have been lost but for their assistance.

'One-armed Charlie is dead—died last night—and there is going to be high jinks roasting him to-night ; will you come and see the ceremony ? '

The speaker was Darkie ; the words addressed to Roland, only just 'turned out,' and still drowsy ; the situation, the new hut ; the occasion, a bright, clear morning, just after sunrise.

'What the deuce should I go and see that disgusting process for ? and how do you know anything about what is intended ?'

'I got up early and rode down to the blacks' camp to get some fish for breakfast. Such a weeping and wailing was going on that I knew something out of the common had happened. So I waited until Jack the Whaler had the manners to notice me. (You know the fellow who first joined Bronté's crew.) After getting the fish, he told me the old man had "crack-a-backed" a little before daylight ; and as he was a big man in the tribe, he would be paid all the funeral honours befitting his station. Of course, it was not put precisely in that language, but that was what the beggar meant.'

'Well, as roasting is part of the honours, I hope they won't eat him in their enthusiasm. He'd be mighty high and tough, if age and condition go for anything,' said Grantley.

'They certainly won't eat him. Indeed, as an article of food, Charlie would be decidedly unpalatable to the hungriest aboriginal ; but, to do them justice, I never knew them in their direst straits resort to that, or contemplate anything like cannibalism. How or why they roast their dead, or some of them, I don't know ; and, never having seen the process, I want to go to-night.'

'All right, then, we will go ; but what about the darkies ? will they object to our intrusion ? We know that they never speak of their dead willingly, or allow strangers to see them, if they can prevent it. All the time I have been here I have never seen one, except on the platform in the trees where they put them, when close observation is out of the question. Ultimately, no doubt, they take them down and bury them, but they don't mark the place or appear to like any one to know anything about it. Therefore I think they will strongly



object to our presence when the remains of the defunct Charles of the one arm are being subjected to the fiery ordeal.'

'Possibly they may cut up a bit rough ; but we are both favourites, and see it I must, if it does lead to a cracked skull.'

'All right,' said Grantley. 'We'll probe the mystery to the bottom, if either mystery or bottom there be. Meantime, to breakfast. The first duty of man is to nourish himself ; it must be, if it is such a great sin to kill one's self : that's the natural deduction, and it's a wonder it never struck me before. So fry the fish with all speed ; and I say, Darkie, don't forget to take the insides out, as you did last time. I'm not educated up to appreciating these native delicacies yet.'

When evening came, the young men strolled down to the blacks' camp, which was situated a little above high-water mark about a mile from the Fishery. The camp consisted of some dozen *wurlies*, generally nearly circular in form, constructed of stakes or rib-bones of whales stuck in the ground and leaning inwards so as to support each other, thus forming an apex at the top. The whole was then covered with seaweed, and, if not impervious to rain, they were at least very warm. A few were more ambitious in construction and much larger in size, but they were the exception.

On this occasion, considerable preparations had been made for the important function on hand. In the centre of the wurlies a kind of platform was erected, of wooden uprights placed in the soil with horizontal bars across, about three feet from the ground. Under these bars smouldered a fire, and round it sat a circle of naked natives of probably the highest rank, while behind them again were others, and round the camp-fires clustered the women and children.

The fires shone out on the darkness as Darkie and Roland approached and became aware of a strong odour of combined 'condolly' and the various perfumes pertaining to the picturesque wild man, particularly in winter, when his great objection to the cold prevents him ever using water as a

cleansing agent. There was also—or was it only the effect of Grantley's excited imagination?—another more pungent smell, that Darkie did not appear to notice; at any rate, he paid no attention to it or to the slight commotion their arrival created, but stepped through the outer line of seated natives and stood by the inner circle. Roland followed, painfully conscious that the air was laden with something besides ozone, and considerably awed and surprised.

As I have said, the central object round which the chief men sat was the small platform with the fire underneath, and on that, above the flame, sat a ghastly figure—none other than the dead Charlie himself. The right arm was extended and fastened by a string to a beam; the withered and mangled left, still showing how ill unassisted nature had repaired the fearful lacerations made by a shark, hung across his breast as in life, when, however, it had been jealously hidden by the opossum-skin cloak. His head was held erect, with eyes open and staring. The whole body and limbs were reddened with a melting compound of ochre and whale-oil. It ran dripping down from the corpse into the fire below, keeping up the flame, which would have risen too high but for the care of those seated round, who, with long sticks in hand, regulated it to the proper degree.

It was a weird, horrible, sickening sight as beheld in that wavering light. The wild, black forms with lowering faces; the old hags, ugly as uncanny witches engaged in some ghastly midnight orgie; and that ghastly thing, dead yet mimicking life, slowly melting away over the flaring fire. Roland hurried away with Darkie not far behind; the latter would have lingered in hopes of seeing the end and understanding the why and wherefore of the whole disgusting operation, but he did not care to remain by himself, and his companion declared that both sight and smell were diabolical.

'Well,' said Darkie, 'I would like to sift the thing to the bottom while I am about it, and I've lived too long among their countrymen to sicken at a trifle. I have heard that they anoint themselves with the drippings from the body,



Roasting One Armed Charley.



and I wished to set that point at rest ; but it can't be helped. I don't think it is safe to go back ; they might put me where Charlie is without consulting me at all in the matter.'

'Nothing will induce me to go back,' retorted Roland. 'I shall dream of that dreadful figure fixed as if alive over that smouldering fire, the lips drawn back with a grin and the stare in the open eyes. It's beyond conception horrible.'

'I did not think you would feel it so much after your experience of the wreck and the slaughter of the crew on the Coorong ; that must have been bad enough.'

'God knows it was, and I see it yet sometimes ; but there was nothing so repulsive, in one sense, as what we have witnessed to-night. Besides, the one was compulsory, and this is voluntary. In future I'll leave the darkies to deal with their dead without my presence or interference. By-the-by, were Big Tom and his two lubras there to-night ?'

'Tom was sitting in the front row,' said Darkie, 'with stick in hand attending to the last offices (if they are the last) for his departed friend ; and, though an eminently respectable nigger on ordinary occasions, to-night he looked a most diabolical savage. As to the beloved twain, I did not see them, but in all probability they were in the background with the other women, for it appears that the soft sex (we can't dub them fair in this case) are not admitted to the holy of holies, immediately round the roast.'

'I'll have a talk with Big Tom to-morrow,' said Roland, 'and try to find out more about this beastly ceremony of theirs—that is, if Thomas, after the enthralling pleasures of the evening, is in a fit condition to attend to his duties.'

'If he is not, doubtless the two Mrs. Thomases will,' laughed the light-hearted Darkie. 'He, likely enough, will not show up for a day or two, in the hope that you will then have forgotten all about this evening's business.'

'Then he will be mistaken. Though I would not go again, yet I am just as anxious to learn with what object the horrid process is gone through as you are. I know they hate talking of their dead, and beyond telling you what, it strikes

me, is only meant as obsequious flattery, that "they will jump up white fellow," will say nothing. Still, I'll try to pump Big Tom.'

When morning came it did not bring that stalwart savage, and his sable wives, when interrogated respecting his absence, stated that he was too sick 'long big camp.'

'I don't wonder at that—it would make a dog sick,' growled Grantley, and he determined to wait until the next day; but the feminine pair of representatives again appeared with the dairy herd. In the evening, however, on going up to the yard, he found Tom putting up the rails, as if nothing out of the ordinary course had occurred. He even grinned a broad welcome with a splendid set of ivories.

'Tom, what for black fellows put one-armed Charlie long fire?'

The dark face grew set in a moment.

'What for white fellow talk like that? No good,' said Tom; 'by-and-by you "crack-a-back," supposing you talk like that.'

'Never mind me "crack-a-back." What for put Charlie long fire?'

'No good, no good; white fellow "tumble down" you talk like that,' reiterated Big Tom earnestly, and nothing more could be got out of him. He was as inscrutable as the Sphinx, and would only repeat the same formula as to the danger of early dissolution that the white man ran by prosecuting his inquiries into these aboriginal mysteries.

Subsequently, Grantley seized a favourable opportunity, when the two lubras were alone, to ask the same questions of them; but they at once sank into stolid silence, refusing to utter a word. Seeing the strong objections they entertained to communicate to him anything respecting the matter, he gave up further attempts. A frame of sticks with leaves and grass strewed over it could now be seen placed in the boughs of a thick shea-oak which grew near the beach, and on it was laid all that remained of the late chief, One-armed Charlie. It was a sort of sepulture that many of his countrymen had been honoured with before him after undergoing

the purifying influence of the flames, as the remnants of numerous decaying biers of this sort, perched like the abandoned nests of some huge bird of prey amid the branches of the neighbouring trees, mutely testified.

## CHAPTER XII

### AUNT ARABELLA ARRIVES

BEFORE the winter was over a considerable amount of settlement had taken place round Encounter Bay. Several farms were now occupied in the vicinity, their owners having determined to make their living by agriculture. These, if successful, would certainly encourage the establishment of others, and the district would thus advance in population and prosperity. As he was thinking over this one day, and wondering if the sanguine anticipations of the bold adventurers would be realised, Roland received a packet of letters, from which he learned, to his intense astonishment, that his aunt and sisters were leaving England in a few weeks to settle with him in Australia. As there had been a long delay in the transit of the mail, the ladies might be expected very shortly ; and it was with not a little dismay that the young man, as he surveyed his bachelor surroundings, asked himself where he was going to put them.

‘I shall have to build them a house, Darkie,’ he said ; ‘they are coming to settle. If this sort of thing goes on, we shall have to seek fresh fields and pastures new, for there is danger of being crowded out here, or, at the least, of not being able to extend our borders, as the stock increases.’

‘I know splendid country,’ replied Darkie, ‘round the Coorong coast.’

Grantley started. ‘The devil you do ! It must be beyond where I was, then, for that is bad enough—all sand and salt water.’

‘Yes,’ said the other, ‘but not many miles farther ; it

is magnificently grassed and watered ; nothing like it in this district.'

This was the beginning of a project subsequently frequently discussed between them, and ultimately carried out. Enfield and Gifford were consulted, and immediately fell in with the idea. Sheep were to be obtained from the Sydney side by droving overland as they had brought the cattle. The question then arose who should undertake the journey, as one of each of the two parties must remain to attend to their present herds. It was evident that Grantley must go for one. Of the other two the lot fell on Enfield, and it was decided that they should take their departure as soon as Roland's relations were settled in their new home.

Riding home from the Creek station after these preliminaries had been agreed upon, Grantley's thoughts turned to Petrel. What would she think of this new journey ? He knew, too, that he should not find it so easy to part from her as before. Thrown at so early an age almost entirely among men, and obliged, as he had been, to think and act for himself, he had grown old beyond his years, and now realised how much she had become to him. The question, too, would obtrude itself, 'What would the accomplished, highly nurtured ladies who were to take up their abode with him think of the wild Australian girl, ill-educated according to their ideas of the necessary culture of women, but beautiful exceedingly in Roland's eyes—ininitely more so than those of his own race ?' That, however, thought Rolly, will not recommend poor little Petrel. 'There is a peck of troubles ahead,' he soliloquised. 'Why the devil could they not stay at home instead of coming out here to take care of me, as they put it ? I know what that kind of solicitude means. I fancy I can hear them asking what are Miss Cleeve's accomplishments, and see their grimaces when I tell them that she can pull, steer, or sail a boat with most men, and probably leave them in the race ; that she can ride a horse against any man, and fish, shoot, milk, and cook as well as the best—no mean advantages, by the way, for an



Australian bushman's bride. Indeed, whatever my darling does she does really well. Then, what about that other bar my mother speaks of? Does the ignoble stain of convicted criminality really attach to *her* father? It cannot be; that grand, true man can never have been guilty of crime! even if he ever were a convict. They say there are many men on ticket-of-leave, or even in the chained gang now, who were innocent, or found guilty of something that ought to be no offence against God or man. Fancy how my haughty aunt and sisters would elevate their eyebrows at the idea of a Grantley of Grantley Hall marrying a convict's daughter! Without the slightest doubt,' concluded Rolly, 'there will be a pretty nest of hornets about my ears yet.'

Then the thought of his mother's last letter came to him again, in which she laid her dying injunctions upon him never to forget his name and lineage, and that his blood was pure, and must be kept pure from every taint. 'There is in all England no prouder name than yours. Ally yourself to none but the noble, if you can, but at least to the honourable and stainless. Bear in mind that you may yet be called upon to take your ancestral place among the best-born of your native land. These are my last words; remember, cherish, and act upon them, if the occasion should ever arise, as you love me.' Such, as we have seen, was the purport of the letter that he had so often perused. This letter was but a reflex of her own feelings on this subject, which she had striven with no slight success to instil into the susceptible mind of her boy. It was in his eyes, not alone a solemn injunction, but a dying command breathed with almost the latest breath of a loved and loving mother.

That evening Grantley spent at the Fishery, and told the Cleeves both of the expected arrival of his aunt and sisters and his projected departure for Sydney. The Headman expressed unqualified approval of the stocking of more country with sheep.

'I only know the western part of the Coorong coast, but there is no doubt that some of the land there is grand, with

fine lakes and rich soil—perhaps too rich and wet for sheep,’ he said ; ‘but it is well known that the blacks about there are a bad lot.’

Petrel looked with serious eyes at Roland while he was discussing the matter of his going to Sydney with her father, and also the dangerous proclivities of the south-eastern aborigines, but cheered up at the mention of the advent of the ladies.

‘Won’t that be nice for you!’ she exclaimed ; ‘but what a pity you must go away so soon after they come ! They won’t let you go, you may be sure, for a long time.’

‘I don’t think I shall find it half so hard to leave them as a certain little girl I know,’ he whispered, and her large bright eyes grew brighter still at the tender tone of his voice.

‘Why must you go, Rolly?’ she murmured ; ‘send Darkie, and you stay to look after the station and your relations.’

‘It won’t do, Pet ; he can attend to things here, but could not take my place in Sydney, nor would Enfield consent. I must leave you, little woman, for a few more months.’

They were now outside strolling down towards the rocks on the beach. Sitting down on a favourite seat of theirs overlooking the sea, Roland, continued—

‘You won’t miss me so much this time, Pet ; there are lots of people settling about here whom you will soon know.’

‘I don’t want to know them,’ she answered ; ‘I liked it better when we two were alone. You will tire of me now, and go to your own people,’ and the big tears glistened in her eyes.

What could he do but kiss them away ?

‘I’ll never forget you, dear ; I should be a wretch indeed if I did. I love you, Pet, love you very dearly,’ he murmured, clasping her close, and the girl gazed into his flashing eyes, believed, and asked no more.

There was no engagement ; Petrel wished for none, thought of none ; she simply loved with a perfect trust that never admitted of a shadow of doubt. With the youth it

was different ; his thoughts dwelt much on the future, in spite of the halcyon days that he revelled in now and the passion that stirred his blood into flame.

‘ Love her ! my God, I do love her ! but if there is this convict stain, what am I to do ? ’ he often said to himself.

In Petrel’s presence, however, this self-torture ceased. She charmed away all misgivings. How could it be otherwise when she was there, so loving, confiding, and passing beautiful ?

Her father and aunt saw nothing ; Roland had always been affectionate, and the girl’s natural shyness had grown when she became conscious that she loved. She was now less demonstrative when her lover was present, and as he was much occupied in preparing for the arrival of his relatives and for his own journey, there really seemed to be nothing in the relations of the young people to excite the notice of their elders.

At length a brig sailed into the Bay one day and anchored under Granite Island. A message presently arrived to the effect that the expected ladies were on board, and intended landing at the Point in the afternoon. Grantley was out on his run when the message came, and did not return in time to welcome them on board, but as soon as he got back drove down in the cart to receive them on landing and convey them to the cottage. Presently a heavily laden boat drew up to the beach, but the tide was low and the water very shallow, and it became evident that the only way to reach *terra firma* was by mounting on a sailor’s back.

There were five women, one at least of buxom build, and there remained a considerable expanse of water to traverse before reaching the land. On the shore stood a line of savage black forms, male and female, arrayed in native ‘ buff.’ Roland stood a little aside, enjoying the spectacle.

‘ I tell you, Maria,’ protested the elderly lady, ‘ it’s not decent. Tell them to send those naked wretches away. Besides, no man can carry me all that distance ; he will be sure to drop me.’

‘Well, aunt, Joan and I will go first ; the men are becoming impatient.’

‘Then put your veils down, dears.’

This much could be heard, uttered in suppressed tones, accompanied by little stifled shrieks, as two of the ladies on ‘sailor-back’ left the boat and approached the land. On came the muffled fair ones, and by-and-by they were safely deposited directly in front of Grantley, who immediately stepped forward and embraced his elder sister.

‘Oh, you horrid rude man!’ shrieked the insulted damsel. ‘Why, I declare it’s brother Rolly! How you frightened me!’ laughed Maria, half-hysterically. Whereupon ensued more kissing and embracing.

Then two well-grown maids were brought to land by frolicsome tars, after great pretence of falling and exhaustion, which caused a vast assumption of indignation on the part of the blushing damsels. The boat was now so considerably lightened that the men, who obviously viewed the substantial form of the elder lady with the respect due to large proportions, were enabled to drag it within a short distance of the water’s edge.

‘It would be a fitting welcome to Australia, aunt, if some of the aboriginal gentlemen, who have assembled to honour your arrival, were allowed to carry you on shore,’ said Roland with a perfectly grave face. ‘They have requested me to convey their desire to you.’

The lady glanced through her veil at the row of black figures, with their white teeth glistening as they laughed at the strange scene.

‘Not for the world!’ she declared. ‘I wonder, nephew, how you can propose such a thing! I would sooner return to the ship.’

‘But this is Arcadia, aunt. Besides, to the pure all things are pure.’

‘Fudge!’ said the lady, with an unmistakable toss of her head.

Old Ocean solved the difficulty in his own way. A heavy

swell ran in unobserved by the sailors, who were engrossed with the novel sight of the natives, and caught the boat, tossing it up on the beach. Miss Grantley was thrown over the side on to the strand, giving a goodly exhibition of understandings that put those of the natives of her own sex to utter shame. Roland and her nieces rushed to the rescue, and when she realised that no damage had been sustained, and that she was at last actually on land, her ruffled plumes calmed down.

‘Allow me to escort you to the carriage, Aunt Arabella,’ said Roland, after he had duly saluted her; ‘the remainder of your luggage will be brought up later.’

‘Where is it, my dear?’ she replied, looking round inquiringly. Roland led her ceremoniously to the cart.

‘Ah, nephew, I see you have developed into a wag; but was it well to make me the butt of your wit at our first meeting?’

‘You have made a bad beginning, Rolly,’ said Joan, ‘by ruffling the dignity of the family.’

‘Ah, poor me?’ he answered plaintively. ‘What evil spirit possessed me to try to take a rise out of Aunt Arabella!’

Then they drove off, and after the occupants had several times been bumped into a heap in the bottom of the cart, drew up at the door of Roland’s new home.

‘Welcome, aunt, to “Talkie Hall,”’ said he. ‘I regret that a few sticks and pebbles are still left on the drive. It’s lucky that our colonial carriages pass over them so easily,’ he added, with a merry twinkle.

‘Thank God I have arrived, nephew, though it be covered with bruises and contusions. Certainly your cottage is beautifully situated; and I must congratulate you on your manly appearance—quite the Grantley features, my dear.’

Miss Grantley prided herself on possessing the characteristics of the distinguished race from which she sprang. She was above the middle height and somewhat given to embonpoint, with strongly marked features, the nose especially being decidedly beaky. Her eyes were large and clear, and

she still possessed good, well-preserved teeth, which she frequently showed between her rather thin lips. It was, on the whole, a decidedly aristocratic face, not lacking in intelligence, but certainly not pleasing. The two girls, both older than their brother, could not quite lay claim to his good looks. Though their faces were very dissimilar in expression, each had the family features—the same dark hair and pretty blue eyes, rounded chins, and rosy complexions. Maria had the better nose ; Joan, the younger, the prettier mouth ; she, too, was much slighter than her sister. Brought up, as they had been, by their aunt, they were well impregnated with caste prejudices, and above all with the fact that they were of the blood of the Grantleys of Grantley Hall, and must act up to the traditions of that august family. But withal they were good, honest English girls.

## CHAPTER XIII

### BRITISH JUSTICE

SOME months after the events narrated in the last chapter, the newly established monthly mail from Adelaide made its appearance, just two days behind time, bringing the following official letter addressed to Roland Grantley :—

‘OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER OF POLICE,  
ADELAIDE.

‘SIR,—I have the honour, under instructions from the Commissioner of Police, to inform you that the Government have determined to despatch a detachment of police under the command of Major Cuthbert to investigate the circumstances attending the reported massacre, on the Coorong, of the crew and passengers of the brig *Mary* by the natives. As you are said to be the sole survivor of the ill-fated ship’s company, you are requested to hold yourself in readiness to attend the party to the scene of the disaster.

‘The detachment leaves here to-morrow, the 23rd inst., and will probably reach Encounter Bay on the 26th ensuing.—I am, sir, your obedient servant,  
J. M. FORBES.

‘ROLAND GRANTLEY, Esq., Encounter Bay.’

‘Well, they have been long enough about it,’ grumbled the recipient; ‘and this means a delay in getting off to Sydney, too. I suppose this inquiry will lead to nothing more than a present of blankets and flour. By heaven, I wish I could have the command of the force!’ and the dreamy eyes flashed. ‘The manes of my brave old friend would be satisfied, and all those who died that night bitterly avenged!’

When told of the expedition, Darkie informed Roland that he had arranged to meet a stockman on a neighbouring station, and would be absent for several days.

‘It does not the least matter,’ replied the other. ‘You had better collect all the stragglers, in any case, before I leave for the overland trip.’

‘All right,’ said Darkie, as if pleased, and before the arrival of the police he was gone.

On the evening of the day named, Major Cuthbert rode up to Talkie. He was a fine, soldierly-looking man, and greeted the young squatter as an old acquaintance, having already met him in Adelaide.

‘Business first,’ he said, ‘and then you can introduce me to the ladies. My party are camped at the Point, where I propose forming a permanent police station. I don’t think it desirable to linger here more than the night, as it is inadvisable to give the blacks any opportunity of communicating with the Coorong fellows, with whom we know they are often friendly. Then, again, I am to leave some of my men at the Murray to patrol the country round here in order to apprehend a band of our noted vagabonds who have lately located themselves in the district, and if I stayed here with my large party it would excite their suspicions. I have boats at the Elbow, ready to meet me at the Mouth to-morrow night. Now, are you ready to accompany me first thing in the morning? I can mount you.’

‘Any time you like, major, and the sooner the better, for I am only waiting for the conclusion of this business to start for Sydney.’

'That is settled, then,' Cuthbert replied; then turning to his orderly he said, 'Return to the camp, and tell the sergeant to be ready to start at daylight, and to send a horse for Mr. Grantley here with mine. By-the-by,' he said to Roland, 'if you are going to Sydney, the *Black Swan* sails the middle of next month. We shall have finished this job before that. Why, there's time enough to hang all the blacks on the Coorong, eh?—if we could only catch them. Seriously though, Grantley, do you think you can identify any of the actual perpetrators of the murders—fellows that a man can hang, not only with a clear conscience, but with satisfaction?'

'Yes, one, and one only,' replied Roland; 'a fierce-looking devil with a scar across his brow and cheek, and wearing a brass locket of some sort on his chest.'

'Well, that is something; he can't get rid of the scar, anyhow, and if we catch a fellow with both your distinguishing marks, that will be confirmation strong as—well, if not as Holy Writ, yet strong enough for us to string him up. But what about the scoundrels who nearly caught you at the Mouth? Is it possible that you can point them out?'

'No, quite impossible. I scarcely saw them, and was only conscious that they were close to me.'

'I can understand that,' said the major kindly. 'Possibly Cleeve or some of his boat's crew may be able to recognise them, or even the pretty little daughter, who so pluckily winged, or rather legged, one of them. If you will walk down with me this evening, I will interview my friend the Headman. Now for the ladies,' said the gallant major, drawing himself up in his best military manner.

The Headman was delighted to see the major when later in the evening he entered the cottage with Roland, and the two immediately fell into what appeared an interesting conversation. Petrel was still more pleased to meet Grantley, and whatever they had to say was doubtless still more interesting to themselves. An unwelcome interruption presently came. 'You had better ask her, major,' said Mr. Cleeve.



‘ Well, Miss Petrel, I want you to tell me all about the black fellows you prevented snapping up this young fellow. Were they ugly or handsome, old or young, bald-headed or wall-eyed ? ’

‘ What a lot of questions, sir ! ’ said she, laughing ; ‘ but I don’t know what they were like ; I was too frightened to look.’

‘ But not too frightened to shoot straight,’ said the officer, smiling. ‘ Don’t you think you would know any of them again ? ’

‘ I am sure I should not,’ she answered ; ‘ I never saw them after I fired. I was watching Roland. He looked so dreadful as he ran up and fell into the boat.’

‘ A lucky shot for Grantley, which no doubt saved his life,’ remarked the major.

‘ You must remember, sir,’ said Cleeve, ‘ that the Mouth is a ticklish place to enter in an open boat, and there was a tidy swell on into the bargain. I was watching the boat, and of course, the men at the oars had their backs to the land and could not see the blacks. As for my little girl, she had the best chance of seeing them ; but she was deadly pale, and really did not know that she had hit one until I told her.’

‘ I don’t doubt what you tell me, though I am much disappointed, as I am anxious to obtain some evidence to justify the action I am ordered to take. I hoped you might be able to supply sufficient to identify the three savages, who would certainly have killed our friend here but for your gallant interposition, which I am instructed by the Governor to say he fully recognises. Now, good-night,’ and, warmly shaking hands, the major departed.

Roland had meanwhile been taking a farewell of Petrel on his own account, under the verandah.

‘ One of the best and most honest fellows in all Australia, even though he be a convict,’ said the major as they walked on, ‘ whatever his back record may be ; and most certainly the prettiest girl, bar none, and I think I know them all as yet. I was sorry to press them about the d——d blacks,

but it was necessary, not merely because there is an impression among the police that these people will not give evidence, but because I don't like the responsibility of making an example being entirely thrown upon me. Some have got to hang, and if witnesses can be found to swear to the guilty parties, there need be no compunction; but if I am compelled to pick out two or three out of a campful, why, to say the least, it's unpleasant.'

It may be imagined with what feelings Roland heard the major's reference to Cleeve's past life, which confirmed his as yet almost unacknowledged suspicions. But in the necessity for action he put the matter from him for the present.

The following morning the detachment was early on the march for the Murray Mouth, where it arrived the same evening. The boats, with supplies from the Elbow, were already there. Preparations were immediately made, and the horses were passed over by swimming behind the boats, a man in the stern holding the reins. When over, camp was formed, with instructions that an early start would be made in the morning.

'I hear from the Elbow party,' said the major, 'that the whole tribe are camped some distance along the Coorong; so that we shall probably complete the objects of the expedition the day after to-morrow. I shall not linger over it, you may be sure.'

On resuming the march, the party was spread out so as to search the strip of country between the lake and the sea, and continued to move on, except for a halt for lunch, until evening was setting in, without seeing a single native. Then some smoke was observed five or six miles away.

'Camp,' ordered the leader; 'we will surround them as soon after daylight as possible.'

No fires were allowed; the horses were picketed near; and in the early dawn the party silently started. On approaching the smoke, now distinctly seen rising from among the sandhills, the force was divided, the larger portion being sent by the beach at a brisker pace, so as to encircle the camp.

They were to keep on the soft sand, so as to deaden the sound of the horses' hoofs ; yet it was soon apparent that they were heard by the blacks, though too late for escape had they attempted it, as the troopers were now closing in, carbines in hand. Along the lake-side rode the major and Grantley, with about a dozen troopers, forcing their way through some low bushes, when three or four dark forms dashed past in the direction of the water.

'Stand, in the Queen's name !' roared the officer, military etiquette predominating for one single instant over his instinct to pull the trigger of his revolver. But the newly acquired, disloyal subjects of England's majesty paid not the slightest regard to the order, which they did not understand, and with fleet steps they fled on. Another moment and they would dive in the water. 'Fire!' and a dozen reports rang out in the clear morning air. Two of the four black forms immediately collapsed, the impetus of their flight carrying them shooting along the turf, as a sportsman has often seen a bird do when killed on the wing. A third reached the edge of the lake, endeavoured to dive in, and died in the effort.

The fourth, tall and spare to leanness, plunged in, the bullets dropping over the spot as he disappeared. A moment later his hand could be seen grasping the far side of a bark canoe which floated on the rippling tide, and then, keeping it between himself and his foes, he swam rapidly away with the bullets hailing round him. When fairly out of range, he rose in his frail craft, his savage form glistening from the water in the morning sunlight, and with gesture and shout hurled his defiance back at them.

'The scoundrel has escaped,' fiercely broke from the excited major ; 'pretty shots you fellows must be. But we may catch him yet.'

'That is the man of them all you most wanted to capture, major—the fellow with the scar ; I am sure of it from a glimpse I had as he passed us in the bushes,' said Roland.

'Then we have made a bad beginning,' replied the officer, 'for there he goes straight for the other side, far beyond our

reach. I don't know how the devil we missed him, but it can't be helped. Are those fellows dead?' he asked a trooper.

'Yes, sir, dead as Julius Cæsar.'

The order was given to rejoin the main body at the blacks' camp. The natives there had made no further attempt to escape. The women had sunk on the ground, clinging to their children, with loud wailings; some of the older hags adding much vituperation of the 'white devils' to their lamentations. The men, with sullen, lowering looks, still grasped their weapons, as if they meditated resistance. Altogether there were perhaps a couple of hundred souls, encircled by the troopers with levelled carbines.

'Disarm them,' ordered the major, and two of his band dismounted and collected the whole of the various weapons. A few of the native warriors made slight demonstrations of resistance, but the threatening carbines overawed them, and they all surrendered their arms; then they cast themselves on the ground and added their cries of despair to the wailings of the women.

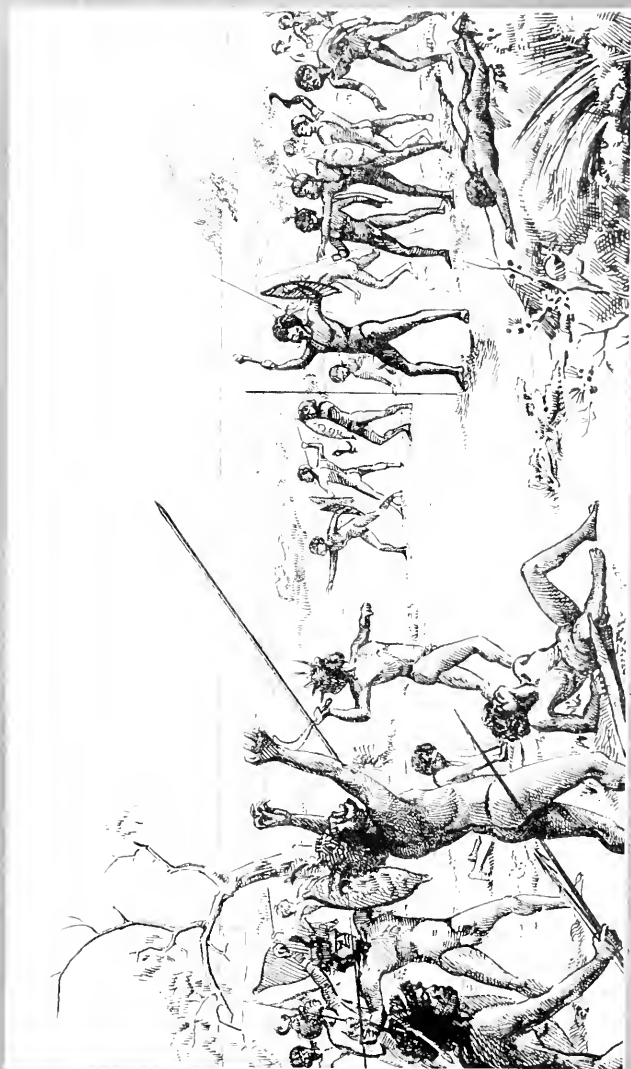
Grantley was now ordered to identify the murderers of the crew and passengers of the *Mary*. After a close examination he affirmed that he recognised no one. The men were then made to stand up in a row apart from the women, and he was told to inspect them carefully and endeavour to point out any who were present at the massacre, or who pursued him along the beach. Once more he declared his inability to swear to any.

'I am sorry to hear it,' said the commander. 'We will now view the bodies; perhaps you may be more successful there.'

The three slain were laid side by side, and the young man attentively observed them. With distorted features bearing still the impress of the death-agony, they gazed open-eyed at the sun shining full in their dead faces.

With a shudder Roland stepped close and gazed at each, then turned abruptly away.

À HOMERIC  
COMBAT





‘It’s no use, sir,’ he said ; ‘for aught I can tell, I may have never seen any of them before.’

Again the major said, ‘I am sorry for it,’ and there was a deeper meaning in his tone than before.

‘Grantley,’ he added, ‘if you could have sworn to one or more of these dead wretches as having been engaged in the slaughter of your fellow-passengers, it would have made my task much lighter. As you can identify neither dead nor living, I must do my duty and accept a grave responsibility.’

Leaving the dead, they again returned to the camp, where the captives were arranged before the officer. Efforts were then made to elicit from them some information respecting the wreck and subsequent massacre. First of all a search was made for any relics of the unfortunates in their possession. This resulted in the discovery of the remains of a blanket wrapped round an infant, a worn-out knife, a broken cutlass-blade, an old axe, and a few battered tin utensils. Obviously these had belonged to Europeans, and possibly to the ship’s company.

Grantley was asked if he could recognise any of them as having formed part of the articles that were carried from the wreck, but was unable to do so. Pointing to these, the troopers most conversant with the ways of the aborigines made inquiries by signs and the peculiar ‘pidgin-English’ early adopted by the whites when communicating with native tribes. Apparently understanding their desire to obtain more of the relics, the blacks showed the utmost readiness to produce all they had ; more old cutlasses, axes, remains of blankets and sails were forthcoming, also some portions of fire-arms.

Poor wretches ! they little comprehended that they were thus volunteering evidence against themselves. Persistent efforts were then made to draw from them some admission respecting the fate of the ship’s company, but no reliable information could be obtained. There were many signs and much talking, in which the sea, the Coorong, and the sand-hills were evidently alluded to ; but it was all very unintellig-

ible to the major. He watched for any recognition of Roland by any of them, and ultimately came to the conclusion that a considerable number knew him again, particularly the women and young people. He at last gave up in despair all hope of being able to bring home the crime to any particular individuals, and gave instructions to cut down a couple of stout saplings which grew near the margin of the lake. When set in the ground they stood about eight feet high. A cross-beam was put on the top, over which two ropes were flung, each with a running noose at the end ; when completed, the thing looked greatly like a gallows. Two men were then pointed out by the major among the group of savages, and they were led, after their arms had been tied behind their backs, under the cross-beam, and the nooses put round their necks.

The tribe was then ranged in front, and the major in deep, stern tones told them that, having murdered some white people, the subjects of the great Queen over the sea, he had been sent to punish that wicked act. It was so long since it had happened, that they might have thought it forgotten, but the law of his people never slept. They must therefore take warning and never more molest white men and women, but be good and peaceful subjects. There was a great deal more, the speaker beginning in the usual broken English with a mixture of signs, but ending his peroration in the purest Anglo-Saxon.

A brief pause followed, and then came the command, 'Up with them,' and two struggling figures were suspended in the air.

'God have mercy on their souls !' added the major.

The face of each Englishman there seemed set as hard as that of the leader himself, as they stood motionless until the welcome order was given, 'March !' Then with a sigh of relief they rode from the spot, leaving the stricken tribe alone with its dead. Stunned, surprised, and confounded at the tragic termination of the scene, which few of them seemed to anticipate, they covered their heads or sank to the ground.



Presently, loud and piercing, the wild wail that every tribe raises in the moment of sorrow and affliction sounded on the ears of the avengers as they withdrew from the scene of what was then considered justice, necessary though imperfect.

The major was very thoughtful, and spoke scarcely a word until the camp was formed that night. Then, over a savoury weed, his brow relaxed and he unburdened himself thus—

‘Grantley, I have but carried out the instructions given me—and a soldier can do no less—without questioning the right or wrong of the matter. If you could have shown me the actual culprits, I would have hung them with pleasure ; but as you couldn’t, or wouldn’t (I’m d——d if I know which), I had to pick out the two I thought most likely to be guilty, and hang them, *pour encourager les autres*. After all, what else could be done ? You saw the utter impossibility of proving that any one of them had taken a part in the murders ; yet we know that most of them had ; and if something had not been done, they might have thought they could go on killing us with impunity.’

‘I am not going to argue the point,’ replied Roland. ‘I have no reason to feel anything but a desire for vengeance on this tribe ; but I expect there is another side to the matter, and that is the one from which the blacks look at it.’

‘Possibly,’ replied the major. ‘At any rate, it has been a devilish unpleasant bit of work, and I’m glad it’s over. However, somebody had to do it.’

Thus spoke the officer, who simply carried into effect the decrees of the Executive of the country. It was not for him to inquire into the efficacy or justice of hanging men in presence of their tribesmen who were, in all probability, ignorant of the reason of their suffering thus. The farce of judging them by our laws and addressing them, without the slightest knowledge of their language, on the enormity of doing what their own customs approve and even enjoin as a duty, is evident enough ; but, even after the lapse of long years, it is hard to suggest what else could have been done,

if any action was to be taken at all. It does, however, seem a satire upon our boasted civilisation that we could find no other way of meting out justice than the rough-and-ready method adopted in this case. At best, acts like these are but a travesty upon the majesty of the law which can but grieve right-minded men, and for which the reputation and fair fame of the colony have deservedly suffered.

'Yes, Grantley, I will gladly stay at your house to-night,' said the major, as they returned to Encounter Bay. 'I have to pick up my men and maybe a prisoner or two before leaving for Adelaide.'

During the evening Miss Grantley was anxious to learn full particulars of the journey and how the murderers had been punished.

'I really want to know, major, because I almost feel as if one of my own relations had been killed. Roland and his mother were in the ship, and he only just escaped.'

'Well, madam, when we had captured nearly the whole of the Coorong tribe, we found unmistakable relics of some ship's company, probably that of the *Mary*, in their camp. Tolerably strong circumstantial evidence against them, I think?'

'Certainly,' replied the lady; 'but you surely did not kill them all? I presume you selected a few you found in possession of the articles—that, it appears to me, would have been the proper and merciful course—and hanged the worst of them.'

'That was what I intended,' said the major with a grave face. 'The first memento we discovered was claimed by a desperate villain, perhaps two years old, of chubby aspect and with a dreadful scowl. I regret, now that I know your opinion coincides with mine, that I did not incontinently hang the desperado.'

'Nonsense, sir; you would do nothing of the sort, of course. Hang a child, indeed!'

'Then, madam, what would you have advised?' said the officer.

'Punish the leaders, of course,' promptly answered the lady.

'Precisely,' replied he. 'I had two of them arrested and hanged before the others as a warning to the tribe to be of good behaviour for the future.'

'But why those particular two?' she persisted. 'Had you any proof against them?'

'Certainly, the very strongest in the opinion of your adorable sex. They were the most villainous-looking of the lot.'<sup>1</sup>

'O major, major!' cried the horrified lady, 'you have hanged the unfortunate men because they were ugly!'

## CHAPTER XIV

### A HOMERIC COMBAT

AMONG the retainers of 'Talkie' were a native family, consisting of three adults and two juveniles, the head of which was Big Tom, already mentioned, the prefix being given to distinguish him from Little Tom, a fellow-countryman engaged at the Fishery. Big Tom, as his title implies, was a tall, fine specimen of the Australian aborigine such as the white man found him, before the combined effects of our vaunted civilisation, alcohol and disease, had blighted and debased him.

With broad shoulders, ample chest, and narrow flanks, his form presented an appearance of litness and activity seldom seen in the European. Certainly his features were not what we call classical. Possibly his nose might have been so before the fishbone thrust through the cartilage had drawn it into the shape that the connoisseurs of beauty among his people esteem perfection; but this is doubtful. The probability is that a persistent course of such treatment for generations had resulted in compelling stubborn nature to mould the aboriginal nose to the desired flat type. His

<sup>1</sup> A fact.

teeth, however, were splendid ; there was nothing they could not crunch up with perfect ease that could be considered an article of food. If he desired to crack the hard round kernel of the native peach, now known as the ' quondong,' why use the stone at his hand, when those superb grinders had only to lightly close and the thing was done ? As to the bones of the kangaroo, the emu, or the white man's sheep, when he desired to extract their succulent marrow—crunch,—why, it neither required thought nor effort. Then the broad expanse of his open face, particularly the mouth, gave the more room for the good-humour that pervaded it. Tom's eyes were perhaps not his best point ; they scarcely shone like lamps of the soul, as human orbs ought to do. No, their illuminative power could not be considered strong enough for that ; but there was nothing that he required of them to which they were not equal. His great feature we have left to the last, if his beard can be correctly so described. It was black, long, and flowing, and swept over his tattooed chest in untended glory.

Tom as a rule scorned day-wages ; he was a contractor. If you wanted a field of wheat cut, you went for him, and if not under agreement to Mr. Grantley, to whom he always considered his first services due, he would name his price ; and, if accepted, when you woke up next morning, Tom and his lubras would be reposing in his camp—for to work when the sun was high he considered to be ' all same stupid white fellow,' and quite beneath the dignity and common sense of an aboriginal—but the greater part of the crop would be already reaped. The rapid sweep of his reaping-hook, assisted by the scarcely less effective blades of Martha and Mary, had wrought the transformation.

Martha and Mary were his wives, both joined to him in lawful matrimony according to the rites of aboriginal law and custom. Both were about the same age, and nature had in their case shown an unusual impartiality in her distribution of charms, which perhaps accounted for the absolute impartiality with which their lord divided his favours and attentions between them. Two girls much of a size and age

were the offspring of this happy marriage, and neither Tom nor his wives seemed to know or care to which of the mothers they specially belonged.

No one ever heard the slightest quarrel in their camp of any kind, and the lord's authority was paramount. It might be enforced occasionally by the employment of the usual instrument of domestic correction, the waddy; but, if so, the taps must have been comparatively light, to judge by the condition of the heads, or 'cocoa-nuts,' of the ladies. Tom was supposed by the whites to exercise great influence over the Encounter Bay tribe, and it was even said that the title of king had been bestowed on him, but somehow it did not stick—possibly because his height scarcely exceeded six feet, whereas another prominent savage towered five or six inches above him. Big Solomon, whom we shall shortly see leading his countrymen in the battle's front, was the name of this distinguished individual. He rarely left the main assemblage of his people, whereas the rival claimant to the throne, or rather the empty title, preferred a more domesticated and retired life with his two better halves. Tom, too, though a noted warrior, was not in it, in the estimation of the tribe, with Solomon. The latter, like Saul, towered a head and shoulders above his brethren. Active, bold, and skilful, his powers were the theme of both blacks and whites. When his gigantic frame, unclad, and with nought but a tuft of feathers to cover his nakedness, was ornamented with full war-paint, and he had on his left arm his heavy shield of thick gum bark, pointed at either end, while in his right he wielded an enormous waddy, or long-barbed spear, he looked the type of the new land, the very embodiment of warlike savagery.

One-armed Charlie had been another of their noted leaders. A famed fighter before he lost his arm, he neither lost courage nor skill thereafter. When a young man, while he was diving from an outer reef for cray-fish, a shark had torn away the flesh of his left arm almost from the elbow to the wrist, leaving the nearly stripped bone. In time it

healed, but was, of course, useless. So sensitive was he to this disfigurement, that he always wore a cloak of opossum skins over his left shoulder to cover the mutilated stump. What his disposition had been previous to this accident the whites could not judge; but in their experience he was a morose, silent man, known, in spite of his disabled arm, as a demon to fight. That this reputation was not undeserved, he had shown a few months before his death in a long celebrated combat that took place between the tribes of Encounter Bay and the Lakes, or, as the latter was frequently called, the Wellington tribe. As has been the case since the days of Helen of Troy, a woman was at the bottom of it, of course. The Encounter Bay tribe had abducted a handsome young lubra, whom the warriors of the lower Murray claimed as their own. It appeared that she really belonged to neither party, but was captured when a child from a small tribe on the borders of the Tatiara country, during a raid made years ago by a combined band of the present antagonists, on one of the few occasions when they acted in conjunction. The matter was complicated by the Lakes men urging a prior right by asserting that both she and her mother had been stolen from them by the Tatiara tribe at a still earlier period.

For months there had been much wrangling. Many councils had been held, and heralds had passed continually between the rival parties, with no practical result. At last a few young men, led by Yelcoo, a youth who aspired to make the dusky Helen his bride, made a secret night-raid and carried her off. The Lakes claimants insisted that she must be given up to them until an arrangement was arrived at as to her future disposal, a demand which the Encounter Bay raiders laughed to scorn. The older men supported them in this, as winning a wife by the strong hand or by stratagem is quite in accordance with the traditions and customs of their people from time immemorial.

The despoiled tribes were in a state of furious indignation.

That, during the festivities immediately preceding the young woman's assignment to one of their chiefs, an insignifi-

cant band of their hereditary enemies should dare to enter the very camp and carry her off was an insult deeply to be avenged.

Hard on the flying footsteps of the retreating marauders messengers followed, bearing a fierce declaration of war : ' Not as on many past occasions a mere clash of arms, when they had in pity for the weakness and impotence of their foes suffered them to live on, but a war of extermination to the Encounter Bay reptiles.'

The camp of the Bay tribe was a scene of intense excitement. The old men met solemnly in debate, prolonging their discussion night after night. The young men furbished up worn weapons and fashioned for themselves new ones. Expeditions to obtain material for the construction of shields, spears, and waddies were sent into the valleys and scrub. Paints, oils, feathers for the fitting ornamentation of the fighters were sought for far and wide. As the appointed day of battle approached, night was made hideous by the ever-recurring corroboree, in which their courage was stimulated to fever-heat. Daily they rehearsed the coming combat, depicting their own heroic deeds and the ignominious defeat and flight of their foes. They would charge with splendid effect upon the imaginary enemy. Then some of a waggish turn would simulate their flight, throwing away every weapon and ornament with a whimsical exaggeration of the utmost terror.

The Australian aborigine is a born mimic, and these efforts invariably invoked, as they deserved, the loudest expressions of approval. There had been many previous battles between the opposing tribes, generally on a sort of neutral ground near the boundaries of their respective possessions ; but to mark the extremity to which they meant to carry this conflict, the river natives had intimated their intention of seeking their antagonists at their very camp, on the shores of the Big Water. Could temerity go further ? At length the eventful day arrived, and the bedizened warriors of the great river could be seen in gallant array marching in a body

of some two hundred strong over the open ground. At their approach the Encounter Bay men left their camp and deployed on the field of battle. There was no attempt at surprise, or to take advantage of cover or the inequality of the ground. This was to be a fair and open encounter of the contending parties, in which personal bravery and skill in the use of arms, not strategy, were to be the test of victory. When within hearing, shouts and yells of abuse and defiance were freely interchanged. There was also much idle pantomime, in which weapons were brandished and insulting gestures and epithets indulged in. Vainglorious boasting, too, of their past deeds and performances, in which each warrior lauded his own powers and defamed his adversary, occupied a long time.

The Encounter Bay men were reminded of the numerous fights in which they had licked the dust at the feet of their foes in grovelling abasement. They were told that now they would be consumed like leaves before the fierce bush fire, and their women taken to fill the camps of brave men. But if any of the scum should escape by reason of the fleetness of their legs, a few of the old hags would be left them as a solace.

The river warriors were taunted in their turn as being unable to protect their women from a few boys, as witness the girl now before them. How could they possibly take her back, when the warriors of the Big Water stood by with spear in hand? No; the river wombats were always good at talking; they had long tongues but small hearts.

There was much more which the modest pen of the historian refuses to chronicle. The men of Encounter Bay now pressed closer, with their chosen leaders in front.

There stalked the big Solomon, looking more colossal still in his full panoply, his huge body divested of every garment, but covered with alternate stripes of white, red, and jet-black paint, which barred his brawny chest and circled round his eyes, arms, and legs. His beard was burnt off, but the hair of his head remained, adorned with tall, waving feathers. In his left hand he bore his waddies and shield, the latter,



like himself, ornamented with gay circles of paint. His right grasped a long and heavy barbed spear.

Over more than half the distance separating the two opposing forces he steadily strode on ; then drove his spear into the earth as a sign that there he had taken his dauntless stand. And there he stood, a striking figure, breathing war and defiance. Big Tom, One-armed Charlie, and some other chiefs followed his example in like proud and warlike adornment.

The challenge was not long unanswered ; a warrior nearly as tall and distinguished as the opposing chief led on the river men to the assault, and in a few seconds the air was dark with flying weapons.

Wonderful was the skill with which the shields warded off the glancing spears. Wounds were given and received in silence on both sides ; but when the first impetuosity of the combat had died out and the contending parties were drawn apart, the tall spear was still standing in the same place with the great chief beside it.

Weapons were collected for a renewal of the strife, while defiances were hurled at each other by the hostile parties. Some who had received severe wounds retired from the hurly-burly, which soon began to rage again, the foes, however, now keeping a greater distance from each other. Greater attention at this stage of the fight was paid to the correct aiming of the weapons, as much of the martial ardour of the warriors for hand-to-hand fighting had become exhausted.

The older and more experienced combatants defended themselves with consummate skill. At length a light spear with grass-tree stem, flung from a *wommera* with terrific force by the leader of the river band, transfixed a youth near Solomon, killing him on the spot. It projected behind his back more than a foot, still vibrating with the impetus of its flight.

The chief gazed for a moment at his dead kinsman, then plucked his spear from the ground and rushed to avenge his death. Regardless of the showers of blows received on his

buckler, he approached his foe ; then, shaking the long weapon until it quivered again, he launched it straight at the opposing leader. Fairly and well it was caught on the guarding shield ; but, too heavy, and thrown at too short a distance, to be turned, it tore through the tough, hard bark and sank into the broad breast behind. At the same instant One-armed Charlie had slain another famous warrior, receiving himself a fearful wound in the act.

The fall of their chief, followed immediately by the loss of a second hero only less noted, was too much for the river men, and they began to retire, though without disorder, and carrying their dead with them. Seeing this, and also that the lubra, the innocent cause of the strife, was standing near with some women, the savage to whom she had been assigned rushed up and drove his spear through her. ' If not for me,' he shouted fiercely, ' then not for another.' He caught the body ere it fell in his arms, pressed it hard, and fled away.<sup>1</sup>

There was no attempt at pursuit, as both parties had suffered severely and were considerably exhausted. Each of the tribes concerned subsequently declared that none of their injured died ; whether this was so or not it would be hard to say. In civilised warfare is there not the same difficulty in obtaining reliable information of the respective losses of the opposing armies ?

The river tribe asserted that it was a drawn battle, and in proof thereof brought forward the fact that they carried off their wounded and slain ; they also maintained that they had achieved their object in the death of the unhappy woman who had caused the dispute.

The coast tribe, on the other hand, claimed the victory on the ground that they had killed two of their enemies' men for one of their own, and remained in possession of the field. The woman had certainly been killed, but that was a small matter ; had their foes succeeded in carrying her off, it would have been very different.

Such was the end of the famous fight between the two

<sup>1</sup> A fact.

southern rival tribes, the last of any importance they ever fought.

The dead warriors were accorded every honour by their people. With great lamentation and loud extolling of their matchless courage and many virtues, their remains were passed through the fiery ordeal in full council assembled in much the same manner as were those of One-armed Charlie, who never recovered from his wound, but himself died a few weeks later.

But, apart from the grilling, have we not often heard something similar by the graves of our own people whose virtues in life were not remarkable?

As for the slain woman—pooh! nobody cared about her now. In life she had her uses, but dead . . .

## CHAPTER XV

### PET'S TROUBLES BEGIN

‘AUNT,’ said Roland a few days after his return from the Coorong, ‘I want to introduce you to some of my retainers. It is only a short walk. They have just come back from a hunting excursion, and are anxious to see the “big one white lubra.”’

Miss Grantley was delighted, and presently found herself in front of a circular kind of erection made of boughs and grass laid on sticks, which were stuck in the ground and sloped to a point at the summit. Nearly half of the primitive building was left open, so that there was no difficulty in seeing into the interior. Within sat Tom, Martha, Mary, and the little girls, all more or less unattired. As the visitors drew near, all except Tom came to meet them. He stayed behind to dress himself—that is, to put on a shirt. The ladies of the family, no doubt believing that ‘beauty unadorned is adorned the most,’ came forward smiling and without a blush between the four of them. In their delight they would have embraced the lady, and did in the most

affectionate way lay hands upon and stroke her fine garments, while her nephew looked on with an amused and quizzical smile. Tom now appeared fully attired in a particularly short twill shirt Roland had given him, which he now wore for the first time.

‘Big Tom, his wives Martha and Mary, aunt, and their two daughters,’ said their master; ‘and a most estimable family they are.’

‘Nephew, I can only say that I am both shocked and surprised that you can permit them to go about so indecently clad.’

‘I really thought they were not clad at all,’ he interrupted slyly.

‘You know what I mean, sir. Of course they are not clothed, and it must be seen to at once, before they come up to the house. I am ashamed of you that it has not been attended to long since.’

‘Where was I to obtain the petticoats, aunt?—make them?’

‘Yes, sir; I daresay you have not always been nearly so well employed,’ replied the indignant lady, and she began to retrace her steps, the native family, who noticed Roland’s scarcely restrained laughter, merrily following. Observing this, she stopped and told them to ‘Remain at home,’ imperatively. Then she walked on again; but seeing the totally unconcerned way in which they still came on, ‘Do go back,’ she said imploringly. Roland had been compelled to stay behind with Tom, to avoid exploding outright. They were now close to the house, and in a moment would appear before the pure eyes of the maidens whom she had brought up; they must never be allowed to come in contact with such depravity. At her wits’ end, she turned frantically to Roland, and, screaming ‘Send them away, nephew, or I’ll change my will,’ she fairly fled into the cottage.

‘That one cranky, mine think it,’ said Tom, while the lubras and girls laughed with immense delight to see the convulsions that Grantley could control no longer.

The paroxysm somewhat over, he heard his name called from the house, where he found his sisters with preternaturally grave faces and some articles of feminine attire.

'Aunt says you are to give these to the natives and tell them to put them on instantly,' said Maria, pursing in her lips bravely.

'But they won't know how, and I can't show them. Ask aunt what is to be done,' he replied in such loud tones that he knew she must hear through the wooden partition. But that justly incensed lady would not be drawn; and whether the young joker could instruct them how to don the mysterious garments or not, the Australian matrons shortly appeared, to their own inexpressible pride, in the conventional 'body' and petticoats.

'Aunt,' said Roland shortly afterwards, when she was less sore about the episode we have related, 'I presume you will endeavour to Christianise these poor benighted savages. You cannot approve of Tom having two wives. It's not allowed by our religion, and therefore must be desperately wicked.'

'There is no doubt about that, nephew; and since it troubles you, you had better prevent it,' she sarcastically replied.

'I have seriously expostulated with the husband,' he answered demurely, 'but he says "that one Martha and Mary berry much likum me."' You may be more successful, as one of their own sex, with the wives.'

'Why were they called by these names?' said Miss Grantley, quite ignoring the latter part of his observation.

'After the sisters of Lazarus, I've been told; some people profess to see a resemblance between the characters.'

'Two sisters! Worse and worse; what dreadful immorality! It ought not to be allowed.'

'Roland, I won't let you go on making fun of aunt. You know that Martha and Mary are not sisters, as you implied. You told us the other day that the blacks are very particular that blood-relations, however distant, shall not marry,' said

Maria, as her brother retired from the interview with considerable amusement. 'It's really too bad to tease the dear old thing so,' she continued, following him out.

'Does her good, my dear; she requires an opening for her superlative righteousness, and I supply it. Besides, you two believe in the efficacy of missionary work among the heathen, and the sooner you are disabused of the idea the better.'

A few days later Roland had the war carried into his own camp in a rather disconcerting fashion.

'I have been with your sisters to thank the Cleeve family, nephew, for their kindness to you. The aunt seems rather a superior sort of woman for her station, and the girl'—Miss Grantley went on, casting a sidelong glance at him—'is perhaps too pretty for her position; it is a pity her education has been so neglected, but I daresay she knows enough to qualify her to become a small farmer's wife.'

Steadying his voice, but for the life of him unable to prevent a tremor in it, Roland replied: 'I am sorry to hear it, because I am sure that not one of the family desires thanks; and unless you carefully avoided any reference to attempting to repay the obligation, they will be greatly pained. As to the prettiness of Miss Cleeve'—and he felt that he had better leave this part of the assault unanswered—'I was not aware that any woman could be too beautiful.'

'To reply to your last observation first,' said his aunt, 'that is just where you men make a great mistake: good looks in girls of the lower orders generally turn their heads, and very often the heads of silly young men, who profess to admire them. They become so infatuated with the attentions paid them, that they consider themselves too good for men of their own station. I shall be very sorry for that child, very sorry,' added Miss Grantley with emphasis, 'if any of the gentlemen in the neighbourhood are foolish enough to take notice of her; at present I think she is really a very respectable young person. As to your disapproval of my thanking the family for their kindness to you, my dear

Petrel Watching the  
Whale Hunt.







Roland, I am surprised at you. It was due to myself as an older member of our family. The Grantleys of Grantley Hall should not remain under an obligation to their inferiors for one moment longer than is absolutely necessary. I have already written to your uncle, as the head of the house, on the subject, and fully expect that he will insist on handsomely remunerating Mr. Cleeve for the expense and trouble he has been put to on your account.'

'Then, by Heaven,' broke out the young man, 'you must stop anything of the kind, or I will repudiate not only the deed, but my name and family as well.'

'No, you won't, my dear, do anything so absurd,' coolly replied the lady. 'In the first place, you are too proud of your grand old name. In the second, there is too good a prospect of your inheriting the estate, for you to risk losing it by offending your uncle.'

With a muttered oath Grantley left the room, baffled and disconcerted, yet, in spite of himself, impressed and elated with the prospect, hinted at by his aunt, of the fine old property ever becoming his. He was angry with himself for the feeling, too, knowing that the clever woman with whom he had to deal would use it to mould him to her will. It was evident that she knew more about the matter than he did. He was well aware that she was in regular communication with Sir Archibald, and he was doubtless the subject of discussion, possibly was even now on his trial.

'Petrel—there is the trouble,' he said to himself. The conversation to-night had been for a purpose—a settled purpose on the part of his keen-witted relative, and he had innocently dropped into the trap by showing his love for the girl.

'That 'cute old woman will quite understand now that I am fond of Pet, and will draw her own conclusions as to what effect playing the chance of my inheriting the Grantley estate against her will have. Damn it, I am glad I'm off to Sydney to-morrow; it will give time for things to settle down somehow. Curse the old meddler! Why can't she leave me to

take my own course? Poor little Petrel! I can't and won't give her up for a thousand estates.'

Yet while he vowed it he doubted himself.

This doubt increased when he thought of that convict stain attaching to her father's name of which Major Cuthbert had spoken. 'Miss Grantley of the Grantleys of Grantley Hall cannot yet be aware of that, or it would have been driven home and clinched—that is very sure. Well, sufficient for the day is the bother thereof;—now to say farewell to my darling before I start; there she is at her father's door.'

'Petrel, my Pet, I am come to say good-bye; my darling, how can I ever leave you?'

'O Rolly, your aunt has been here and your sisters. She is such a grand lady, and—and—I don't like her,' bursting into tears.

'Nor do I, my dear; an old cat, who puts her hidden claws into other people's business. But what did she say?'

'I hardly know, but dad and auntie were dreadfully offended at the way she thanked them about you. Auntie said she patronised them as if they were poor people in England, and hinted that they should be rewarded—wasn't it cruel?'

'The devil take her!' said her nephew. 'I feared it would be so, when I heard she had put her oar in, in her high and mighty way. But, Pet, what did she or the girls say to you?'

'Never mind, Rolly,' hanging her pretty head: 'that does not matter.'

'Yes, it does, dear; I must know before I go.'

'I don't want to part you from your family; you are the only son, and your sisters say they are so fond of you,' sobbed poor Petrel; 'but I am fond of you too.' Then more incoherently still: 'They say that there is a young lady in England you are to marry by-and-by.'

'The very first word I have ever heard about it, I swear,' he vehemently answered. 'It is not true; I love you, Pet, and no other girl under the sun, in the new world or the old.'

Nestling in his arms, she looked into his earnest face and was comforted. How could she doubt when her own true heart beat so loyally and lovingly towards the hero of her first dream of love !

\*       \*       \*       \*       \*       \*       \*

A few days afterwards, Miss Grantley again perused the following letter which she had recently received from her brother, Sir Archibald :—

‘GRANTLEY HALL, CUMBERLAND.

‘MY DEAR ARABELLA,—My last acquainted you with the sad intelligence of the accident to my dear son Gerald in the hunting-field. I told you then that even if the worst was averted it was probable the ill effects would be permanent. In this my fears have been verified in the bitterest way. The doctors unanimously state that he must remain partially paralysed for the rest of his life, and that, if he ever did marry, it would be quite impossible that he could be the father of a child. He may live for years, but they bid me be prepared for an early termination to his sufferings.

‘Under these painful circumstances, it is my duty as the head of our ancient house to make the best possible arrangements to ensure that a fitting successor to our long line of ancestors should fill the place that I hoped would devolve upon my son and his heirs. You know that I looked to our brother John’s sons as the next heirs, not only by right of succession, but as being nearer to my love ; but since their father’s death these two young men have been behaving in a most scandalous manner—drinking, gambling, and even worse. I now therefore turn to the son of our other brother, poor Roger, who died on the voyage to Australia. I am in receipt of your letter saying that he is a fine young fellow, perhaps none the worse for the romantic experience he has undergone. His mother I detested, and never could understand how a Grantley could be such a fool as to make her his wife. She came of fair blood, but certainly not equal to ours, and then he had the opportunity of contracting a splendid alliance if he had chosen. No wonder I never forgave him for rejecting it for the most fleeting of good looks, with nothing else to recommend the woman. Were she alive now, I really do not think I could bring myself to select her son as my heir-presumptive. To install her in Grantley Hall would be too much. Fortunately her death removes this objection. My little girl is now sixteen, and both good and pretty. If young Roland is all you say—and I am sure that I

may depend upon your judgment in a matter of such importance to our family—it would please me to see them form an alliance, thus probably keeping the title, name, and estate intact in the family. I include the title, because it will scarcely be held long, if they ever succeed to it, by either of my scapegrace nephews, the next heirs, as they are both already broken in health and are rapidly killing themselves. It is my most ardent desire that the young people should come together, but still I do not make it an imperative condition to Roland's inheriting the estate. If he prefers to engage himself to another lady of untainted name and good family, so be it. Heaven forbid that my daughter should be forced upon any man. She will in any case be amply provided for. Since, however, much of the scum of our country has been involuntarily sent or has naturally gravitated to Australian colonies, there is a danger of a young man becoming involved in an engagement of an objectionable character, unbecoming the future master of Grantley Hall. My bones would undoubtedly turn in their grave if such a dreadful contingency as I venture to contemplate should arise.—I remain, your affectionate brother,

ARCHIBALD GRANTLEY.'

'Yes,' thought Miss Grantley, 'I did quite right not to tell Roland what is in that letter. It was much better to hint to him, and her too, what a future may be his. He will have time to think it well over while he is away; and even if he does not forget his pretty little rustic, he may see on which side his bread is buttered. Quite a vulgar kind of proverb, by the way; but no one heard me, and it is very expressive. I am certainly acting in the best interests of Roland in separating him from that girl, of whom he would tire in a week, and giving him Grantley Hall and a title, thus killing two birds with one stone—another rather vulgar proverb, I declare, because it's only low people who kill birds with stones; our class shoot them. Then, again, I shall like to go back to the old house, and Roland would be obliged to do something for me, in common decency. Yes, he must go home and marry his cousin, Sir Archibald's girl. At any rate,' she added with emphasis, 'he shall not marry this one.'

Poor Petrel, though her lover has gone, is singing blithely,

all unconscious of the letter quoted above, as she mounts the Bluff to the old 'look-out' where Roland and she have so often wandered together hand-in-hand before he became a man and, like a hero, went out to seek his fortune. A whale is in sight, and she has come with much of the old excitement to watch the dear dad once more brave the perils of the chase. She anticipates no disaster; he has too often dared a similar danger with impunity for her to feel any special anxiety now.

The day is calm, and there are two boats racing along side by side, so that help is near if any accident should happen. In the Bay on the outer side of the Bluff, and between it and West Island, are two whales.

'A cow with her calf,' says Ben, the look-out man, 'always the most dangerous to take.'

There are altogether four boats out, the one which is racing the Headman's boat being from the opposition fishery at the Nob. Both crews are straining every nerve to fasten first, having now rivalry to whet their ardour. Cleeve's other boat is far away, down off Seal Rock, while the fourth is just leaving the Police Point.

Idly the whales play and disport themselves with awkward gambols, their huge forms showing on the surface of the water as they roll and toss about with their great black backs glistening in the sun. There is a moment's pause, as if danger is seen or scented, and then away they go side by side, making for the open sea. The Headman sees their intention and steers to cut them off; and now ensues a race between the boat propelled by its seven oars and the monsters of the deep. At the reef they double back, apparently fearing to cross, though the water is deep, and the same desperate struggle back to the Bluff follows. Once more the monsters turn, and again the boat cuts them off from the open sea. In the shallow water close to the rocks their huge heads and backs rise to the surface, and they turn again, Jack the Harpooner making a futile attempt to fasten as the Headman swings the boat round. Away once more, every

man bending desperately over his oar, while the other boat still follows close.

With flushed face and eager eyes Petrel watches each movement of her dearly loved sire, her heart filled more with pride than with anxiety. She now runs down, however, to the rocks directly overlooking the scene of the chase, which she recognises as one of more than ordinary danger as well as interest. What if the monsters rush on that frail boat kept daringly across the only way of escape between them and safety out in the wide, open ocean? Repeatedly failing to pass unmolested, they will surely at last dash their pursuers to fragments in their frightened fury. 'Oh, dad, let them go!' she thought rather than said.

At the reef the beasts swiftly doubled as before, the harpooner again launching his shaft in vain, as the craft swings round responsive to the powerful strokes of the Headman's steering oar. Now they fly back again, but closer than before to the larger whale, and Petrel instinctively feels that her father means to steer alongside it, at all hazards, at the next turn under the Bluff.

'Stick to it, men!' shouts the Headman; 'another spurt, a few more strokes yet. Now, Jack, be ready as she doubles,' and the boat glides within a few feet of the leviathan, as it rises from the submerged rocks at the brink of the breakers. The harpooner's arm is raised, this time not in vain, and the weapon is driven unerringly into the great bare back. In a moment, whale and boat, the latter half full of water, are tearing out to sea at tremendous speed. Meanwhile the calf has parted from its wounded dam, and, as it lies motionless on the water, the other crew row up to it and make fast before it has made a movement. Then it rushes after the other, and a scene of almost indescribable confusion ensues, lines becoming entangled and boat colliding with boat. Once, after clearing the ropes, the Headman only clings on to the end of his line by one hand, his powerful frame being strained to the utmost to sustain the tension.

Exhausted with its struggles, the calf at length lies still,

and the crew fast to it make a few strokes towards it. The old whale appears to understand its danger, and dashes at the approaching enemy. One awful moment, and then Petrel sees the crushed boat and struggling men strewing the sea.

'Cut away and save life!' is the Headman's swift order, and his boat is immediately steered among the swimmers, regardless of the infuriated monster close by its dying young. There is a sweep of the vast carcass, and then, with a stroke of its tail, the rescuing craft and crew are tossed into the air. Men, oars, and fragments of the boat are flung up as if by an explosion, and then fall strewing the waters.

With a face white as marble and as cold, Petrel gazes shuddering at the awful sight. It seems an age, but really is barely a minute, till the other two boats shoot up to the spot and begin picking up the drowning men.

'Thank God!' she murmurs. 'Oh, thank God!'

All are at length in the boats, and then the two—alas! only two—rapidly row round the Bluff in the direction of home. From the rocks above the girl's agonised eyes eagerly search for the splendid form she knows so well but will never see erect in its magnificent proportions again. Round the Bluff she runs still watching, and, taking up a position at the cove on a projecting rock, she awaits their approach. With wet eyes the rough men see her, and one with softened voice calls out, 'He is alive!' She can see him too, lying in the stern, his white face propped against the side, with agony stamped upon it. He feebly waves his hand as the boat sweeps swiftly past. Sick at heart with heavy foreboding, she flies along the rocky shore to the landing to meet them. Stretched on a door, they carry the Headman up to the cottage, with both legs broken, and otherwise fearfully bruised and mangled. Of the other crew, two men are badly hurt about the body and a third has a leg badly fractured.

'It was the opposition boat's fault,' said Jack the Har-

pooner to the unheeding girl, as she walked up by her father's stretcher ; ' they ought to have left the calf alone till we had killed the cow, then it would never have happened ; as it was, we should have been all right if we had not gone to help them.'

As she held her dear dad's hand, the strong man suppressed his groans to save her sorrow.

' A bad job this, auntie,' he said as they carried him into the house.

The best advice possible was obtained—that of a young medical man lately arrived in the neighbourhood. But in the case of Cleeve and one other man he ordered the patients to be sent to Adelaide, as the only chance of saving life.

' I will accompany them,' he said, ' to render all the assistance in my power.'

Petrel would not leave her father, so she and her aunt went with him in one conveyance, while the other badly injured man and his attendant travelled in another, the doctor attending on both.

Darkie was of great service. He at once offered both a vehicle and his services the moment he heard of the accident, swearing that Mr. Grantley had left instructions that the whole station was to be at the disposal of Mr. Cleeve if required. He acted as driver, and all through the long and painful journey whatever the most tender care and solicitude could do to alleviate the sufferings of the Headman he did. When he bade Petrel good-bye, she pressed his hand and with streaming eyes thanked him for all his kindness.

' It's nothing,' he said, turning his head away. ' If I could be in his place, I would, for your sake.' Then he hurried off, and the same night was far on the road back to Encounter Bay.

' She has true grit,' he muttered as he went, ' and in my opinion is far too good for any man living, Roland Grantley included ; but, like all of the best sort, she is not conscious of it.'



## CHAPTER XVI

## THE STAR

ROLAND GRANTLEY, meanwhile, was in Sydney, and, truth to tell, the young man had found its pleasures taking a strong hold upon him. Young, handsome, and high-spirited, he found no lack of friends of either sex to help him to spend his time and energy. Hitherto he had easily excused his delay in the colonial metropolis on the plea of business, but now an inner monitor reminded him that the excuse was no longer a valid one.

Enfield had weeks since gone up-country to inspect sheep for the overland journey, and now wrote to say that near Yass on Cootrala station he had found what they required at reasonable rates, delivery to be taken within a month. Teams, horses, and the whole turn-out could be bought better on the spot, and he had better tear himself away from the enervating delights of demoralising Sydney without delay.

‘He is quite right, and I will go to-morrow,’ Roland said ; but the next day came, and the next, and he still delayed his departure. Just at this juncture, however, a friend he had made received an imperative summons to return to his station, which was situated near Cootrala, and offered him a seat in his trap. This was too good an opportunity to be lost, so with many regrets our hero took his departure.

‘You have a long journey before you,’ said his friend, Fred Condsey of Lake James, as they trotted along. ‘I don’t fancy a longer stay in town would make you any the fitter for it.’

‘True, most sapient adviser ; I look upon you as a direct instrument of Providence sent to pluck me like a brand from the burning.’

The other laughed.

‘Not quite that, and I don’t want to preach, but a fellow gets soft by too much city life, and you are going on an arduous

undertaking that wants a man to be at his best. I would like to go with you, if this little place of mine could take care of itself. Rely on it, those black devils about the Junction will remember the lesson you gave them and endeavour to return it with interest. There is quite spice enough of danger to render it interesting.'

'We got through all right last time,' said Roland lightly, 'and I expect we shall this. We know now what to expect, and understand the niggers better.'

'Undoubtedly, but don't forget that this trip you cannot move so quickly, particularly when crossing rivers. The stubborn brutes of sheep may keep you days before they will take the water. However, another party with cattle has gone through since you did, and according to Sydney gossip has taught the noble savage that "the wrath of the white man is a consuming fire."' '

There was a pause, and then Condsey continued—

'With what is doubtless a proper deference to the majesty of the law, which makes it murder to kill a black fellow, we don't talk openly of these things; if we did, it would be awkward for the officials, and they might be compelled to take action; but I may tell you that my cousin was in the party, and writes me that the natives made a determined attack at the Junction on them. The leader, old Blacklock, at the commencement of the fray, got hit with a boomerang, and it made him savage. He gave orders to blaze away right and left, and they did it to some purpose—pretty much a case of "wipe out," I take it, with that lot.'

'I really don't see what else is to be done, if the matter is left to the squatters and drovers,' said Roland. 'But I devoutly hope I may never again have to decide between giving up my property and prospects or shooting the aborigines. I feel sure from past experience that my self-interest will prevail over my objection to bloodshed.'

'I don't question it, and most men would do the same; but the worst of it is that it does not end there, but generally results in a long course of reprisals. It's a case of blood for

blood with the black men, and they don't care who it is, so long as he wears a white skin. I may never have been within hundreds of miles of where his countryman was killed, and may strongly disapprove of the deed; but he will just as soon spear me as another, and the manes of his kinsman will be quite as well satisfied. Some of the Europeans are worse, however; they slaughter the blacks in anticipation of aggression. But we must cut the yarn, for here is our camp.'

A week's journey brought the friends to Lake James, where they were to part.

'Now, Grantley,' said Condsey, 'I will either lend you a horse to carry you over to Cootrala, or you can buy the best piece of stuff in New South Wales from a stockman here. The price is big—thirty guineas; but the colt—he's little more, only four years old—is perfect. If you think of him, I'll send to "Snowy River Bob" to have him here in the morning. Don't, if you want him, try to beat Bob down; he's been offered thirty sovereigns over and over again; he'll simply mount and ride off with a grunt without stopping to shake the dust off his feet, much less wait for another bid. He's a character, is the old stockman.'

'Let me see him,' replied Roland. 'I've been looking for a Sydney-side crack ever since I came to the colony; and if he is what you say, Bob shall have no cause to grunt.'

Early the next morning, Grantley was enjoying the fresh air on the verandah, when he observed an uncouth figure, in basil breeches, rough high-boots, long calf-skin waistcoat, and opossum-skin cap, riding a superb horse in the direction of the house.

The animal paced on with the free, springy step of the perfect hack, his full, bold, bright eyes taking in every object. His colour was dark bay with black points, the only white hairs about him being a large showy star in the very centre of his broad forehead. About fifteen and a half hands high, with a long round barrel ribbed close up to the hips, strong broad loins and splendid sloping shoulders, massive thighs with legs well set under him, short pasterns with bones

flatter than Roland thought he had ever seen them before, feet large and firm, and a long arched neck terminating in a beautiful head with small pointed ears, wide frontal, and spreading red nostrils, he looked a perfect horse, the most beautiful and useful animal that owns man's sway.

With the eye of a judge Grantley glanced over him and mentally decided that he had not a fault.

'Good horse that of yours, friend,' said he, for the rider was evidently 'Snowy River Bob.'

'May well say that, sir; there's not the like of him on the Sydney side.'

'Well,' replied Roland, 'let's come to business at once. What's his price? and I'll ask you about him afterwards, if I buy him.'

'Thirty guineas,' said Bob defiantly, as if he expected a protest.

'He's mine,' said Grantley quietly. 'I'll pay you the money now, if you will come into the house.'

The stockman's face relaxed.

'You are a gent as is a gent, and knows a good horse when he sees one, and doesn't beat a man down. You'll never repent buying him, sir; and if ever your life depends on him, he'll carry you through, if horse-flesh can. Never mind what his pedigree is, sir; I don't know it myself, and I came by him honestly; but he shows breeding in every hair of him.'

'Well, Bob, on second thoughts, I'll ask you nothing. I am quite satisfied with my bargain; and if, where I am going, the niggers get after me, I don't doubt he'll pull me through.'

'Niggers be d——d,' said Bob contemptuously; 'he'll run them varmint blind in less than no time. Star's his name, and he is a star, but he was called that 'cause o' the mark in his forehead. It shows out so, sir, that even in the dark you can see it shining. I would not sell him, but there is them about these parts as have their eyes on him for the road, and they'd be sure to get him from me somehow.'

‘But you could swear to that star,’ said Roland, ‘anywhere?’

‘Ay, sir; but they’d soon paint that out, if they wanted to. I’d swear to him without that, but it wouldn’t help me to get him back if they once laid hands on him.’

‘Oh, you mean bush-rangers?’ Roland said, but the old man answered never a word.

‘Well, Bob, so you have sold the Star, the best horse in the country?’ said Mr. Condsey, joining them.

‘Yes, sir, and I am going to throw in into the bargain this here pair of hobbles that won’t hurt his fetlocks.’

‘Beautifully made and soft as a glove,’ said Condsey; ‘I am sure Mr. Grantley is greatly obliged to you. He has now got quite the best hack and one of the best pair of hobbles in the district.’

All old bushmen know what a comfort to both horse and rider a really well-made pair of hobbles are. These were beautifully made of the best prepared bullock-hide, every part being patiently and even elaborately plaited. They were no trouble to put on or take off, and no exposure to wet or heat would ever harden them.

Grantley heartily expressed his thanks while the stockman was engaged in taking off his well-worn saddle and bridle. Seeing that there was nothing at hand to tie up the horse with, he took a light, plaited halter from his pack, and, putting it on the Star fastened him to the fence.

But Roland noticed what he had done, and exclaimed—

‘No, Bob, that halter is worth half a sovereign; I must pay you for that.’

‘Well, sir, I’ll take the money to drink your health and wish you luck, if you don’t mind.’

Then, saddle on head, the old stockman passed through the gate and disappeared.

‘Just like Old Bob,’ observed Condsey; ‘he gave the hobbles more to the horse than you, and if you had not offered payment for the halter he was too proud to ask it. All the same, you would have lost caste in his opinion if you

hadn't. As it is, when anything annoys him with me, he will no doubt allude to you as "that gent as is a gent and knows how to treat a man." Well, as you brought your own saddle and bridle from Sydney, you have now a complete fit-out; and if you must go to-day, I will ride part of the way to show you the short cut and see how you like the Star.'

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE NOBLE SAVAGE OBTAINS SOME MUTTON

THREE months later two riders sat on their horses on the bank of the river Darling, at the Junction. The river was not then full to overflowing as it was when last they saw it, but shrunk to half its former dimensions. Neither was it of the nearly milky whiteness which so surprised them then, but clear as the Murray itself. That stream, too, flowed now well within its banks, the lagoons and backwaters being dry or detached from the main channel. Otherwise the scene had not so greatly changed. True, the frontage and grass generally was much dryer, but there was still abundance of pasture. In the distance could be seen three clouds of dust, to the initiated unmistakable evidence of the presence of three flocks of sheep, rendering it unnecessary to look for the line of little animals looming large in the mirage. Nearer again were the teams, a horse-cart and four pairs of bullocks with heavy dray crawling slowly after, all showing mammoth-like and misshapen in the quivering, deceptive light.

The horsemen were Enfield and Grantley, tanned and dried up by continual exposure to the fiery sun of Australia in level Riverina. There was no mistaking the splendid bay horse with the dazzling white star, with his bright eyes as full of pride as ever, though some of the gloss of the coat had gone and the ribs and muscles showed more plainly.

'The drays will be up directly,' said Enfield. 'We'll camp near the fallen tree; it will do for a back log, and is

out of the reach of the river-bank if the blacks should attempt an attack by creeping in under it or swimming.'

'Yes,' assented the other, 'it's better to be cautious, as Danker used to tell us. The sheep are coming on; I'll ride back and tell the men they may let them "box"—they can't go wrong in the angle of the two rivers. No bridging this, Enfield, as we did the Lachlan, though it is by no means the formidable obstacle it was the last time we were here.'

'You are right, my boy, in each respect; we must go regularly to work, make forcing yards and strain a rope across on the lower side to keep our "jumbucks" straight, and then we can only hope that the many minds will have but one opinion and get over to the other side as fast as possible. If they set their faces the other way, we are booked to remain here several days. That is their obstinate side; but, as old Neddy says, they have their capricious one too, and women are constancy itself compared to them there.'

'Moralise away, old chap,' laughed Roland as he rode off, 'about women; but it's all humbug, you know; if you could only meet one now, she would possess none but perfect attributes.'

'The young beggar is quite right,' mused Enfield, sitting down on the log and letting his horse loose to crop the grass growing about. 'I don't know why I should wander like a modern Ishmael through the wilds of Australia. Much less should he, with that prettiest of all wild-flowers waiting to be plucked by him. If ever I get a girl to think half as much of me as she does of him, I'll settle down, unless I'm a bigger fool than I look.' It occupied the party two days making the necessary preparations for crossing the river, as it was thought prudent to do the work as thoroughly as possible, so that there should be no breakdown. A rope was strained across the stream to prevent the sheep going down with the current, and a forcing lane was made from the yard to the edge of the water. The body of the horse-cart served as a punt, and in it a few sheep were crossed to the opposite bank, to entice the others over.

When all was ready, the work began. Along the lane the reluctant brutes were absolutely forced, resisting every step of the way, to the bank, then over the bank into the water. From the first it was evident they had no stomach for it. They would smother first in the stream, and if still urged on they lay down supinely, one on another, feet deep. Go to the right or left? Yes; but straight ahead through that strip of water,—no—by all the gods of the woolly race. Those on the other side, however, would cheerfully swim back, and did so, telling their fellows that the other side possessed no attractions worth the passage. More were punted over, others were taken by swimmers, though they resisted until they were nearly drowned; but as to the rest following, in all those ten thousand sheep's heads, there was but one determination—won't won't, won't, shan't shan't, shan't.

'No use,' said the shepherds. 'No use,' echoed all hands at last; so it was decided to leave the matter until late on the following morning, and let the perverse animals starve on the camp and in the yard meanwhile. Probably when the pinch of hunger came, and they realised that the only way to a square meal lay over the stream, they might look at it in a different light.

At ten o'clock next morning, after the dray had been crossed, a few sheep were put over, and began to feed contentedly at once on the grass at the river's brink. Those already in the lane, observing them, evinced a desire to join them. All hands began urging them, and presently they started. Nothing was now required but to keep the pressure up from behind. Better still, those in the yard on the edge of the river began crossing of their own accord, so that, instead of a narrow string of swimming sheep, there was soon a broad band which kept on increasing, until the whole flock was over with scarcely the loss of a dozen, all told.

'Bravo!' said Enfield; 'never was a tough job better done. We are over the rivers, for with these so low the Anabranth cannot give us any trouble; and now, boys, we must be more careful than ever of the blacks.'





AUSTRALIAN RIVER NAVIGATION



MURRUMBIDGEE RIVER STEAMER  
AND BARGE



Nothing was seen of the natives, however, for some days, after which it was evident they were prowling about, as one or two were occasionally seen, and still smouldering fires were found at lately abandoned camps.

'It scarcely looks as if they meant mischief,' observed Enfield. 'I would like to show them that we desire to be friends,' and on leaving camp he placed a damper and half a sheep where they could not fail to find them. Half an hour later he returned to find them gone.

'Shows they are watching us,' said he, 'but apparently with no hostile intentions.'

'Be cautious,' expostulated Grantley. 'I don't think it wise to leave food; it will encourage them to follow, which is just what we want to avoid.'

That afternoon, as they were riding along a little in advance of the teams through a few shrubs from the edge of a thicket, they suddenly came upon three black fellows, apparently by surprise. The natives did not attempt to fly, but appeared to be edging nearer the bushes, at the same time motioning to the whites to retire or look back. Inadvertently Enfield turned round in his saddle, and immediately the nearest native speared him in the loin. Roland saw the treacherous act, and instantly fired, apparently without effect, for the weapon was no sooner flung than the whole three disappeared.

Enfield stooped forward, clinging to his horse's neck, the spear—to Roland's horror, a barbed one—hanging from his side.

'I've got it this time,' he said; 'badly, I fear.'

Grantley sprang to the ground, and, as the shaft was pressing down and causing great pain by its weight, held it up until the cart was driven up. Then a saw was procured and the spear sawn off near the wound. Considerably relieved by the weight of the weapon being removed, the sufferer was able to dismount and take off some of his clothes. It was then seen that it was only a flesh wound, but the shaft had passed alarmingly near vital parts. Grantley endeavoured

to withdraw it, but without avail, and after enduring great agony Enfield begged him to desist. 'There is little bleeding, and I believe if we could only get the thing out you would be more comfortable and would do well,' said his friend.

'We will have another try in camp,' replied the wounded man. 'I feel too faint to stand more now. Make me up a place in the cart where I can lie down.'

They only went a short distance farther that day, as the jolting of the vehicle increased his sufferings. When at rest on the ground, cold-water applications were used, and as the pain abated attempts were again made to extract the spear-head, under the directions of Enfield himself, who knew something of surgery, but without success.

'Leave it alone,' he said at last; 'it may work out itself; you will only aggravate the wound by pulling at it. Most likely the barb has caught on a bone. I have no internal pain, and do not now think it is so serious as at first.'

Later he became easier, and talked quite calmly about himself and the position of the party.

'I was a confounded fool to look away, just to give them an opportunity to pot me. Now I shall of course have to be carried,—a nuisance to everybody, instead of being of some use.'

'I am going to swing a stretcher in the cart for you, to prevent your feeling the jolting so much,' said Roland.

'Many thanks, old chap. You will have lots on your shoulders without thinking of me, for we are in the most dangerous part of the country, and I believe the natives are organising an attack.'

'We will keep a sharp look-out and push on. It can't be helped if the sheep do starve a bit; they must make up for it later on.'

The night passed quietly, and, beyond a slight pain and stiffness round the wound, Enfield was free from suffering; but when in his swinging cot with the cart in motion, next day, his endurance was put to a severe test, and before the day's journey was over his agony was great. Still he refused

to be cast down, and on seeing Grantley's anxious face bending over him he said: 'Don't trouble, old man. I am worth many dead ones yet, though it's certainly an awkward fix to have a foot or two of timber imbedded in one.'

'It's open country here,' replied his friend; 'we will only go a little farther; perhaps to-morrow you may feel the jolting less.'

Thus they progressed slowly round Lake Victoria, and each day Enfield seemed to bear the journey better, though there were no signs of the weapon coming away. He could walk a little, and his appetite was good for a man in his terrible position, and suffering the torture that he at times endured. On reaching the head of the lake he said to Roland—

'There is thick country ahead, where we are likely to be attacked, if anywhere. Order the shepherds to keep close to the teams, and let us push on. I can stand a long journey now, and fire a shot, too, if a gun is put alongside my cot.'

'All right; you shall lead the party as usual, and make Jem drive you as fast as you please. I'll take care the flocks are not far behind. All hands are anxious to move quickly, for there are many signs of the black devils closing in about us.'

Next morning they accordingly travelled as rapidly as the bullock-team could be made to move by the use of a Sydney-side bullock-driver's varied and extensive vocabulary, in which the strongest adjectives predominated, assisted by the continuous application of that formidable weapon in skilful hands, a bullock-whip.

The day being cool, no difficulty was experienced in making good progress for three or four hours. Then on all sides blacks were seen closing in, and the dray had to stop for the shepherds to come up.

'Now,' said Grantley, 'no time must be lost in parleying with these treacherous dogs. We cannot allow them any advantage. So fire away, and make sure you don't waste your powder.'

With something less than the usual amount of fantastic gesticulation and yelling, the enemy came on, with a tall savage at their head. Roland noted him, took steady aim, and brought him down; other shots were fired, some with effect, but the aboriginal warriors still came on. Meantime, Enfield and Jem had continued firing in front, with the result that the blacks there cleared off. Seeing this, he ordered the team to be driven on, hoping that they would not be followed. The sheep, too, had rushed through the opening, and were well in advance. At first this movement seemed successful, as a pause was made by the natives; then they rushed after, flinging spears, and waddies, and boomerangs in showers. In vain the whites fired as rapidly as they could load their weapons. With a bravery that has never been acknowledged, but that is not surpassed by that of the Briton himself, on they came, though their leaders fell under the awe-inspiring lightning of the terrible white *boree*.<sup>1</sup> Seeing that further resistance was useless, the unmounted men rushed for the cart, and, forcing the horses into a trot, drove off, while the horsemen followed, firing at any natives who kept up the pursuit. Nearly all, however, stopped round the dray to plunder it, and to kill the bullocks that were left—fortunately only the pair in the pole, the driver having with great presence of mind unhooked the chain connecting the others, which came tearing on, some with spears sticking in them, their fright making them travel faster than Old Bob's oaths, and bullock-thong into the bargain, ever could do. Several of the party were wounded, and a short halt was made, as soon as it was seen that they were not pursued, to examine their injuries. Fortunately, though serious enough to completely incapacitate two men, there appeared no reason to apprehend fatal results.

Roland was inclined to make an attempt to recover the sheep, but Enfield overruled him. Indeed, the men showed no disposition to again encounter so numerous a foe.

'You would only risk your own life and the lives of all

<sup>1</sup> Devil.

of us,' he said, 'without attaining your object. The wiser plan will be to push on as far as we can to-night, and think over what is best to be done.'

'I would much rather try what a sudden attack on the wretches would do,' replied Roland; 'so would you, old fellow, if you were fit to ride. Ah, well, you are no doubt right, but its d——d hard to bring these sheep all that distance only to lose them now.'

'We'll get most of them back yet, please God,' said the other. 'It's only a three days' ride to the out-stations of South Australia, where we may get reinforcements to help us to give those fellows the drubbing they require before travelling will be safe. Probably it will not be necessary to go beyond Moorundie, or even the North-West Bend, as troopers are stationed there.'

They continued travelling while daylight lasted, by which time they were so far from the scene of their misfortunes that there appeared little to apprehend from the enemy, and a halt was made, a clear open space being selected, to prevent a surprise.

'I shall start at daylight, Enfield, on the Star, to the Bend, or if necessary to Moorundie, and leave you to follow me to a safe distance from these beggars, who are probably regaling themselves on our mutton at the present moment. It must be over a hundred miles from here, but I think my good horse may do it by to-morrow night, for he is as hard as nails.'

'It's a good bit more than that, and part of it a heavy road; but with such a horse you will get to Moorundie early the next day, and, if help is there, you may even make a start back in the evening. I shall therefore expect to meet you in four or five days, and by that time hope to have this beastly thing in my side out, and be able to ride again, so as to take an active part in the victory that is going to restore our fallen fortunes. I really believe the confounded thing is looser.'

'Let me have another examination by the firelight,' said

Roland. 'I should be glad to know that you had got rid of it before I leave you.'

On looking at the wound, the first glimpse showed him that the weapon had worked out nearly an inch, and with a little careful manipulation he managed to draw it away altogether.

'Bravo, Enfield! there is something for you to leave to your children's children, to the last generation of the race that you are going to found in Australia. Drink some water, old fellow; I am a brute to hurt you so much, but I was anxious to get the thing out before I went, and perhaps pulled too hard.'

'Never was pain more welcome,' said the other. 'I'm sure I shall do now, if I can get a few quiet days. For the sake of the other wounded men as well, we won't go beyond Lake Bonney, but shall remain there till you return; the rest will pretty well heal our wounds.'

At the first streak of dawn Grantley mounted the Star, to begin his long ride. He carried nothing but a light gun and a little food, for he wished to save his horse every pound in weight that was possible.

'I expect I must trust more to your speed than my shooting, my beauty,' he said; 'but I'll carry the gun to frighten the darkies with, even if I don't really use it in earnest. Perhaps the mere sight of it may help to keep them at a respectful distance.'

It was an extremely fortunate thing that they had been able to bring the cart away when the attack was made, as it contained a considerable quantity of provisions, sufficient for the party until Roland rejoined them.

'Good-bye,' he cried cheerily; 'keep your peckers up, and you'll soon see me back with a South Australian army to avenge our defeat, and show the niggers that "he who fights and runs away may live to fight another day."'

And away went horse and rider at the steady pace that the experienced bushman knows will best cover the longest journey.



## CHAPTER XVIII

## A LONG RIDE

Hour after hour, with keen glance to right and left, Roland rode on, the gallant horse stepping lightly over the yielding sand, and when the ground was firmer breaking into a trot or even a canter. After the first few hours there was scarcely any danger to be apprehended from the aborigines. At this portion of the river they had never been so troublesome, and were besides overawed by the troopers who occasionally patrolled the frontage, now that a station had been formed at Moorundie.

At Overland Corner he ascended out of the valley of the Murray on to the desolate table-land, covered with mallee scrub, that stretched, barren and worthless, far away on either side of the noble stream. And for the rest of his long ride, with but short intervals where time had worn the precipices down and permitted the track to wind along the river flats, he looked from the lofty elevation on the father of Australian waters winding through the confined space between the opposing cliffs that here shut in that fertilising power that was destined to clothe much of the barren land of the vast continent with measureless luxuriance.

The bushmen, in all the limitless extent of Australia, knows no tract of country that presents a more repellent aspect than the mallee-covered area that fringes the stream he is so proud of, for the first hundred miles after entering South Australia. On the east side the dull, monotonous, green level extends hundreds of miles, almost to the ocean, and far up into Victoria. Out in that scrub, to lose the points of the compass is to lose your life, unless your luck be greater than your bushmanship. If perchance you do stumble on a rise a few feet higher than the surrounding dead level, and a larger stem of the dwarf eucalyptus will allow you to climb it, or failing that, you stand on your

saddle so that your head is a foot or so above the growth around, there is nothing to be seen but an unbroken ocean of level green.

The bewildered traveller may have earnestly longed to rise above the stifling leaves and countless stems that support them and are set thick in the hot sand to bar his progress ; but the sight of that leafy sea extending on every side, and seemingly boundless as the broad ocean itself, appals the stoutest heart.

Once lost in this fearful region, wise is the man who calls all his courage and calmness to his aid, and, waiting until the position of the sun assures him in which direction the river lies, then resolutely steers straight for it, putting aside all preconceived opinions he may have formed as to its position. Only those who have been lost know how hard it is to cast away one's convictions as wrong. You are watching for the sun or moon to rise in a certain part of the heavens, and they appear in the opposite direction. Then to turn and compel yourself, by accepting the indisputable evidence of the orb of day or night, to steer a course that a moment ago you were convinced must lead to destruction requires a clear-headedness and resolution that not every one possesses in such a situation.

The track made by the first overlanders generally followed the edge of the cliffs, where the scrub was less dense ; but occasionally, to cut off a bend or get round the deep gullies, it broke through the thick mallee for a few miles. Here the course of the river was lost sight of, and the traveller could realise what his situation might have been without those nearly obliterated wheel-marks to guide him.

'It's a God-forsaken piece of country,' said Roland to himself ; 'and what nature could have been about to send that great river through it I can't understand. Even if such a botch had been made as far as the Bend, why it was necessary to perpetuate it by making the river turn abruptly from there towards the south, instead of continuing straight on to St. Vincent's Gulf, is more incomprehensible still. No one who

studies the subject from my present standpoint can admit that all things are for the best in the best of all possible worlds.'

At the North-West Bend the Murray meets those huge cliffs which force it sharply round to the south. Here open plains come in, breaking through the weary girdle of monotonous scrub that bounds the noble stream. Hard, dry, gravelly, and apparently impenetrable either to moisture or the genial rays of the sun, they then grew a fair expanse of grassy sward when sufficient rain fell. Mallee, principally of a larger growth, still clothes most of the country, while sandal-wood is scattered over parts of the plains. Immediately round the Bend the everlasting mallee-scrub closes in on the river again, and so continues, with breaks of open plain, to its mouth in Lake Alexandrina.

Considered in all its aspects, it is questionable if the great river of our vast continent could have found a worse area of country to pass through for the last three hundred miles of its course, or could have chosen a more exposed and inhospitable part of the southern coast for an outlet. In the narrow gorge between the confining cliffs, where it winds its way from side to side, every few miles boring into the alternate precipices, as if to eat its way out, lofty gum-trees grow, and beneath them again a luxuriant growth of polygonum bushes and grass.

Noting these things, Roland continued steadily on, sparing his good horse by never hurrying his pace. At mid-day he camped for an hour, hobbling the Star on a patch of green grass at one of the few places where the track descended to the river valley. He ate of the food he had brought with him, keenly watching all the while for the possible approach of a stealthy black foe. He felt that too much confidence could not be safely placed in the tribe inhabiting this part of the river country, particularly when a white man was alone. No one troubled him, however, and at the end of an hour he once more pushed on. The Star, refreshed by the rest and feed, tossed his proud head and, opening his

broad nostrils wider, stretched out a pace that showed he meant to get over a lot of ground before nightfall.

'A hundred miles between daylight and dark, every yard of it, we shall have covered, my gallant bay,' said Roland. 'Truly did Snowy River Bob say that a man's life could depend on no better horse.'

As the sun sank lower the day became cooler, and Grantley rode on at an increased speed. He had passed the North-West Bend without seeing any signs of a recent encampment, and in all probability he would have to go on to Moorundie.

'Another thirty or forty miles, I believe,' he thought; 'I'll do about half of it and then camp for a couple of hours, and when the moon rises we'll put on a spurt and finish it.'

He had ridden fast since evening fell, but when darkness caught him in the thick scrub through which the track was winding he had to go at a walking pace to enable the Star to pick his way over the stumps and fallen timber; indeed, in many places the rider had to trust the horse entirely to follow the track. It was a melancholy, lonely ride. Down below in the deep valley the cries of the waterfowl and night-birds sounded shrill and weird; while from the bush came the long-drawn, mournful howls of the wild dogs, at first far away, then nearer and nearer, until they seemed close behind and on his trail.

'Not pleasant,' muttered our hero; 'but it was worse on the Coorong, with those sleuth-hounds on my track and without you under me,' and he patted the neck of his steed. Once, too, as the road wound near the edge of a cliff, he saw fires burning below. For a moment hope sprang up within him that it was the camp of the men he sought, only to die away again, for there were the black, naked forms squatting round the flames.

He hesitated. Should he go down that dark gulch to the flat below and ascertain from them where the troopers were? The Star settled the question by impatiently reaching out his head to slacken the reins and then starting off again.

'I believe you are right, old horse,' he said; 'we should

only waste time by venturing down there, and it might not be too safe. On a few miles farther, and then on the first flat where there is grass we will camp.'

The horse appeared to know what he meant, for with head held low to scent the path he stepped briskly on, and in about an hour they came to a bend by the river under a cliff, where good feed was to be had by a pool of water, as the Star evidently thought, for he fell-to without waiting for the bit to be taken out of his mouth.

'It's about as dark and dreary a spot as could be found,' thought the young man; 'but as it possesses the two essentials for us, water and grass, I am satisfied.'

So the horse was hobbled out, and Roland finished the last scrap of damper he had, which was as hard and dry as that comestible can be, and that is saying a good deal. A bushman always likes to have a fire to camp by, particularly if he is alone. It is a cheerless thing to fling yourself down as if one spot were as good as another. Then, if you leave it, there may be a difficulty in finding it again, if the night is dark. Roland felt all this as he lay with his head on his saddle and listened to the clink of his steed's hobble chain. He knew he must not lose that sound, or he would not be able to move on when the time came.

The whole place now suddenly seemed to wake into weird life: owls flew by, uttering their discordant cries close to him; bitterns and curlews vied with one another in the loudness of their unearthly screams. Then, just over the pool, a maternal wild-dog and her progeny began a chorus, which was answered by paterfamilias, far away on the high land, in so dirge-like a strain that the listener's blood ran chill. Then a pause, and apparently far off, but really very near, arose more doleful cries. After that, silence absolute and oppressive, till suddenly each tree and bush seemed to burst forth into horrible, awe-inspiring yells. Terrified for the moment, Roland sprang to his feet, while the Star started with affright. The sound of the hobbles as the horse cantered up brought Roland to his senses.

'Whoa, ho!' he shouted, and in a second the magic of the human voice had stilled that infernal din and the night sank into calmness and silence. The stealthy animals were doubtless there, watching man and horse, but neither by sign nor sound could their presence be detected.

Then over the tall dark line of trees beyond the river rose the moon, and the blackness of the dreary place became illuminated by her light. Away in the mallee the low howl of the retreating dingoes could be heard, as Grantley picked up his saddle and bridle and put them on the Star.

'It has been about as dismal a two hours as I hope to spend for the rest of my life,' he said. 'After that I can quite understand what a "new chum" must feel out alone for the first time with those brutes prowling round him. Anyhow, the nerves that can stand that hullabaloo without quaking must be firmer than mine, or yours either, Star.'

Presently daylight appeared in a faint glow in the east, and the twittering of the little birds among the bushes, as he rode past, sounded like sweet music to the weary traveller. As the new day threw its light over the landscape, Grantley recollected the contour of the country well enough to be sure that he was near the termination of his journey. Another half-hour brought a dozen or more horses into sight, at which the Star picked up his ears and gave a joyous neigh.

'The station mob, by Jove!' exclaimed the rider. 'Breakfast and a sleep will do us both good, my matchless steed.'

A black boy now could be seen, bridle in hand, going quietly among them, and one was caught just as Roland rode up.

'Where white fellow?' he demanded.

'Close up 'long ribber,' was the concise reply, as the mob broke into a gallop. The Star forgot his fatigue and bounded after them with all his wonted elasticity.

A row of slab huts on the bank of the Murray formed the

station of Moorundie. Built for the Protector of Aborigines, it necessarily had to provide accommodation for the troopers, who enforced his authority and accompanied him when travelling among the natives. Riding straight up to the principal building, Roland was met by a group of men, one of whom was the individual he could have most desired to see.

‘Very glad to meet you, Danker,’ he said, dropping off the Star’s back to the side of his friend.

‘Roland Grantley, by the powers! and with the best piece of horse-flesh I have seen for years! I believe you know most of us here, but this is the Protector, Mr. Buckstone. Now let me turn this beauty out, and then tell us where you have sprung from.’

‘You could not have come at a more opportune time,’ said the Inspector of Police, when Grantley had briefly told his tale. ‘We have received instructions to proceed up the river to quiet the Rufus tribe. If you had been a few days later, we should have met and saved you a very long ride. I intended starting in a couple of hours, but I will delay until to-morrow if you are too tired to accompany us.’

‘We will do it this way, Inspector, if you don’t mind,’ replied Danker. ‘You go on with the troop and I’ll follow up with Grantley this evening, when he has had a rest and a good sleep. He can have one of my horses and leave his own here until we return; it would be a burning shame to take him back after performing such a journey—a hundred and forty miles, if it’s one, in the twenty-four hours!’

‘You are the best of good fellows,’ answered Roland; ‘I daresay I could start at once, if necessary, but shall be glad of a camp first.’

‘Then that is settled,’ said the officer. ‘I’ll hurry up my fellows and be off. I am not sure exactly where we shall get to, but it will be as far as possible with the packs, and the camp will be so near the track that you cannot fail to see our fires.’

Thus it came about that the relief party was on the road

to the rescue within three hours after intimation of the disaster reached the station.

The messenger went quietly to sleep and forgot all about the matter—not an unreasonable thing to do after riding so many miles without closing his eyes. As for the Star, he probably went to sleep also, when he had satisfied his hunger on the sweet green grass that abounded in the bend of the river. Mr. Danker led him down to the choicest plot he could find, and, while he cropped at it, gently washed his back and legs, like a true lover of a good horse, as he was. He kept talking to himself all the while as he rubbed him down—

‘So you are called the Star? Well, you are a star, and no mistake. What a back and loins! almost too strong for a light weight like Roland; and legs flat and clean as a bar of steel. I can’t find a fault in you, my beauty; and as to not coveting “anything that is thy neighbour’s,” it’s impossible to look at you and not break the Tenth Commandment. I’ll offer Grantley a hundred for you, but he’ll be a fool if he takes it. So you won’t accompany us, Buckstone?’ observed the soliloquiser as he met that gentleman on returning to the station.

‘No,’ said the Protector, ‘the attack took place outside my jurisdiction, which is a very good reason for not interfering. Then again, I am perfectly aware what will occur if you gentlemen meet the blacks, particularly if they show fight. Indeed, though I personally have no stomach for the work, it is necessary that those fellows who now molest every overland party should be taught a lesson that will effectually quiet them. Nothing but a severe one will do it, and perhaps it may be the most merciful in the end.’

‘You are wise to keep out of it, and then you can’t be called over the coals by the Government. They would doubtless expect you to report at length and to justify everything, while the Inspector will only briefly state that the aborigines attacked him in the most aggressive manner and were ultimately dispersed, after the force had incurred



great risk by its forbearance. That 's about the official style, isn't it ? '

' I don't write the police reports ; my own don't leave quite so much to the imagination,' laughed the other.

' " Disperse " is a word that admits of a wide interpretation.'

' Too wide for our present proceedings,' said Danker ; ' but I shall not be surprised to hear that the Government (who, by-the-by, have as yet only played with the aboriginal question) have instructed you (though you do bear the pacific title of " Protector of Aborigines ") to proceed to the Rufus and bring the refractory natives into subjection. Will the word " disperse " mean too much then ? '

' I shall not be astonished by the receipt of such orders, anyhow, unless the Inspector with your assistance does the business for me. Of course, if I do go up, the force will be under my control, and not a shot will be fired without my express sanction. The officer in command will take care to throw the whole responsibility on me—not a very pleasant position for a man of peace.'

' Then you might as well go with us now.'

' By no means—why anticipate a very distasteful duty ? No, what you gentlemen do must be on your own responsibility, except what Inspector Guardly consents to take upon himself. I won't be the scapegoat.'

' You are as diplomatic as it becomes an official to be,' said Danker, ' but we are not going to put ourselves in a tight fix by doing your dirty work. If we had your authority for putting down those black devils up there, it might be different ; without it we simply go to recover the sheep.'

' And in doing so will in all probability come into collision with the black devils, and so do my " dirty work " for me. No doubt it may be forced upon you, but I shall be none the less obliged.'

' Cunning as a fox,' said Danker with a smile ; ' and, to be equal with you, I will spare every nigger I can in the hope that he may be a lasting plague—a very thorn in the flesh—to you.'

## CHAPTER XIX

## CIVILISING THE BLACKS

THAT evening the two friends bade farewell to Mr. Buckstone.

‘Pray, gentlemen,’ said he, ‘recollect that your mission is two-fold, to recover the stock and to pacify the natives, in which laudable and benevolent objects I wish you every success. If you feel a disposition to be hard upon them, remember that you have implanted a taste for mutton deep down in their unsophisticated stomachs, and no savage is good at controlling his appetite. Think what grilled chops, done to a turn, must mean to him after lean opossum and tough kangaroo.’

‘But what about his little weakness, for the white man’s kidney-fat? <sup>1</sup> Are we not to resent that, if we meet him on the war-path?’

‘The uncultured savage must certainly be taught to restrain his craving in that direction,’ replied the Protector; ‘or if he wants anything of the sort, let him be content with the inferior article to be found in Grantley’s sheep.’

‘You are very kind, Protector, but I hope to put an abrupt termination to his enjoyment of even that lesser delicacy.’

‘Ah well, I fear that will scarcely be accomplished until our black brother is terminated also. Good-bye, a successful journey and a safe return!’

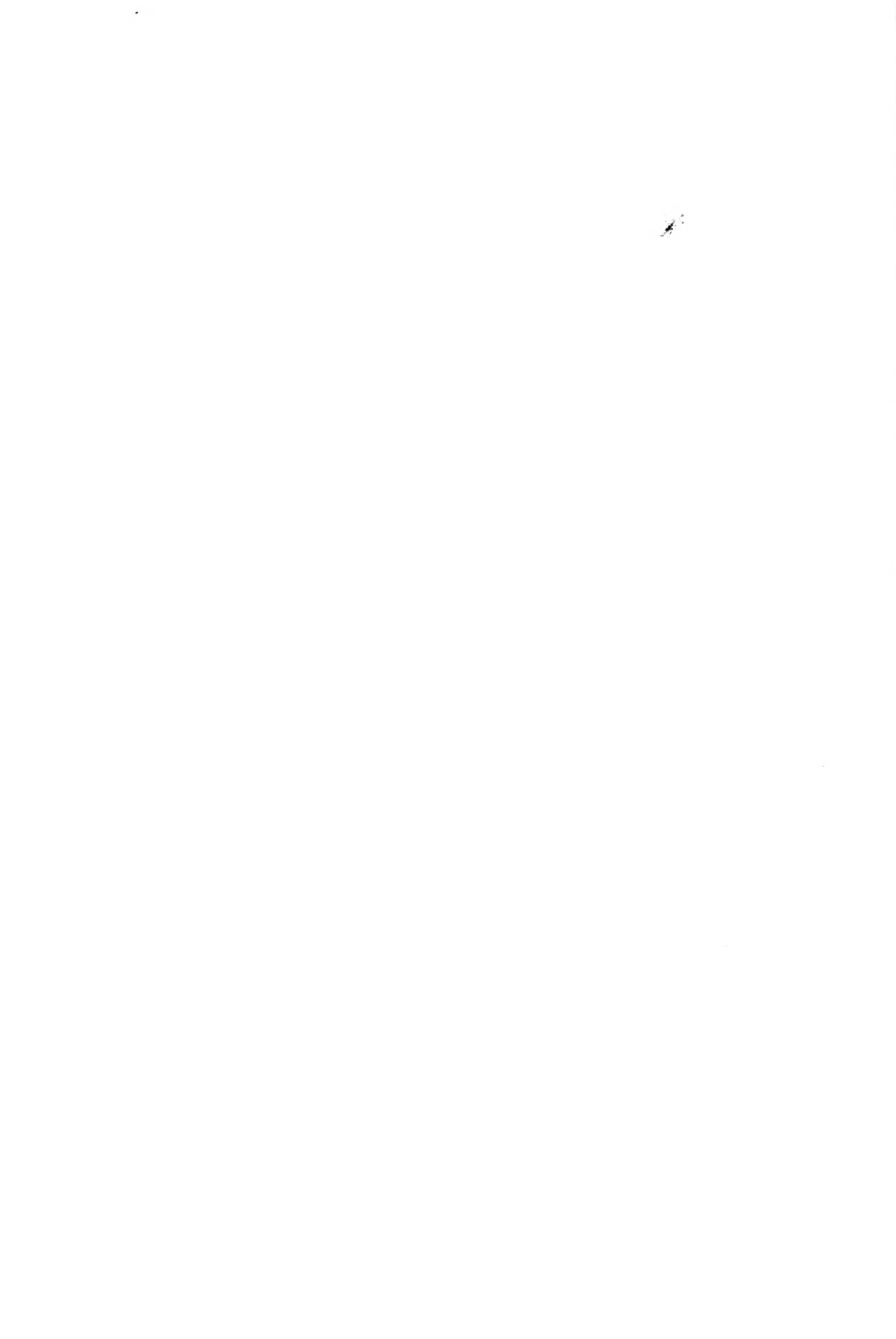
‘A ‘cute man is the Protector of Aborigines,’ observed Mr. Danker; ‘he wants us to exterminate the fighting men of the Rufus tribe, but won’t say so. He knows that when I was in Adelaide little more than a week ago, the Government had nearly determined to send him up with a strong body of police to subdue them, which simply means a stand-up battle in which they would be shot down without quarter. Now, if we are led into a conflict and successfully carry out

<sup>1</sup> The Australian aboriginal was erroneously supposed by the early settlers to have a craving for the kidney-fat of the white man, as a delicate article of food, or as an ointment to inspire courage.

VIEW OF  
ANA BRANCH  
OF DARLING RIVER



JUNCTION OF RUFUS AND MURRAY



the shooting, it will save him an unpleasant task. The authorities have been vacillating as usual on the aboriginal question. Very possibly if we make a slaughter, and thus finally settle the ever-recurring trouble on this track, they may yield to popular clamour and prosecute us. Our safest plan will be to recover your property without interfering with the blacks at all, if we can.'

'And if they won't allow us, which they certainly will not, when they have worsted, or think they have, which comes to the same thing, nearly every party they have encountered? No, I fully expect they are preparing to meet us. They doubtless know Enfield is camping at Lake Bonney and that I have gone down the river, and they will guess that it was to obtain assistance.'

'Probably you are right; still, we may find the sheep without falling in with any large body of them; but if we must fight, let us take care that the Inspector gives the word, and then—the Lord have mercy on the black brutes. Now let us put the pace on a bit, so that we may reach the camp in time for a fair night's sleep.'

It is needless to follow the relief-party through their march. On the evening of the third day they arrived at Overland Corner, and, from their commanding position on the cliffs, could distinguish numerous smokes rising, apparently as signals up the river-valley.

'What about this behind us?' exclaimed a trooper, and there, on a higher knoll than where they stood, about half a mile away in the thick scrub, rose a dense spiral column of smoke, followed by another only a few yards distant from it.

'That is to give warning that we are here, gentlemen,' observed the Inspector. 'However, if they are forewarned, so are we. Forward, men, we will ride on to Lake Bonney before darkness falls. I trust we may find your friends all safe, Mr. Grantley, for there can be no doubt the darkies are round in force.'

Pushing on as rapidly as possible through the mallee, the

troop had approached the margin of the scrub where the country falls to the Lake, when the report of a shot was heard, then two more in quick succession.

‘They are at it already,’ cried the Inspector. ‘Sergeant Jones, keep five men to protect the pack-horses; the rest follow me.’

After a few hundred yards they broke out of the bushes, and came in full view of the Overlanders’ camp, standing in an open grassy flat near the edge of the Lake. On the water in canoes and near the opposite scrub a number of blacks were seen in full flight, though some occasionally paused to make the usual contemptuous gestures. Grantley dashed forward at a gallop.

‘Just in time, friend in need,’ cried Enfield joyfully. ‘We are all safe and getting sound again, but if you had not turned up so opportunely, I believe the beggars would have speared the horses; we have kept them in the bush-yard at night and have protected ourselves behind the timber. How are you, Inspector? Never was man more welcome.’

‘Allow me to compliment you on your well-chosen position; it would do credit to an old soldier,’ replied the officer. ‘Perhaps you are a trifle too near the Lake, considering that the enemy are as much at home in the water as on land. Turn out, men, we camp here.’

After Roland’s departure Enfield had lost no time in pushing on to Lake Bonney, and on arrival there, had at once taken precautions for the safety of his party by erecting a rough palisading of saplings and boughs round the camp. In this they also kept the horses, except when out for the necessary grazing on the flat. Several times the blacks had attempted to approach, but were warned off by a few shots being fired to intimidate them. On the last day, however, shortly before the arrival of the relief party, four canoes full of natives came up the lake, while other blacks were seen in the fringe of the mallee scrub. Those in the canoes paddled up to the shallow water and then got out and, sinking themselves below the surface, endeavoured to

get near in this way. Their object appeared to be to approach as close as possible under cover, and then rush forward on all sides.

'We then began firing,' said Enfield, as he told the tale over the camp fire that night, 'as we momentarily expected a rush, which would probably have resulted in the destruction of us all. Probably some were hit, as there was a great deal of yelling between the bands on the Lake and in the scrub. Suddenly we were surprised by seeing them run, those in the grass for the forest, while the others took to their canoes. Then we heard the tramp of your horses and were right glad to see you riding down. Of course we should have knocked over a lot of them before they could have done so much damage, but in the end it might have gone hard with us.'

Mutual congratulations followed, and Grantley was highly complimented on his splendid ride. He was delighted to find the wounded so much improved.

'As for me,' said Enfield, 'I can mount my horse without the slightest difficulty, as I'll show you to-morrow, for I presume we start in the early morning.'

'Ay,' replied the Inspector, 'it is one of the axioms of war to follow up a retreating foe. I expect the sooner we catch him, the more of your sheep there will be to recover.'

Two days' march brought them to the scene of the attack, where the ground was marked with the fresh tracks of sheep. A little farther on a large flock was seen, some distance off, which gladdened the hearts of the owners. A camp for the night was made, it being well understood that the morrow would bring them face to face with the enemy.

'They are not far from the dray,' said the officer in command, 'as they will hardly have carried all the stores away yet.'

During the evening sounds were heard, plainly indicating that a 'corroboree' was going on, no doubt over the Murray, where they would consider themselves quite safe. This was so obviously a defiance that the Inspector expected an attack

about daylight and due precautions were taken accordingly. Nothing, however, occurred and preparations were made to hunt up the foe the following morning.

As agreed, they first proceeded to the scene of the late skirmish. The dray was there and the two dead bullocks by the pole, with their necks still in the bows. Some of the provisions still remained, and there were indications that a quantity had been removed a few hours earlier. It was quickly decided to follow up the trail. This led in the direction of the river, and presently, on the bank of a creek, the party came in full view of a large body of natives advancing towards them. It was evident that they were quite prepared and courted the encounter. With brandished weapons and derisive cries, they came resolutely on in all the glory of paint and feathers.

'Now, Inspector,' said Danker coolly, 'we are under your orders; you give the word when we are to fire, for I presume we must fight.'

'Fight! what else are we here for?' was the reply. 'Let them come well within range and begin when I tell you.'

A number of spears were flung, but fell short. Disdaining to seek cover, the savage warriors came fearlessly to the attack, leaping, dancing, and clashing their shields and clubs together in bravado and scorn of men they had learned to despise. Their yells and derisive shouts showed that they were confident in their numbers and bravery and looked for another easy victory.

'Now,' cried the Inspector, 'take good aim and fire.'

A sharp report rang out and a number dropped, but the others pressed undauntedly forward. Again a volley was poured in and more of the dark men toppled over. This for a moment checked them and it was well it did, as it gave the whites time to reload. On they came again, however, hurling their spears, boomerangs, and waddies with inconceivable rapidity, and hitting many of the horses which now began to give trouble by their restlessness.



A steady volley thinned their ranks once more, and they broke and fell back among a few bushes in their rear. Here a brief council was held, a fierce old warrior evidently urging them to advance. He prevailed, and at their head, covering his body with his shield, the old hero led them on.

Had he rushed to close quarters, the charge might have been fatal to the white men, but the Australian blacks rarely close in hand-to-hand combat. Still they pressed closer and closer, the white men now receiving many wounds. The Inspector again shouts 'Fire,' and more black forms are stretched on the grass, but the old chief still wildly encourages his followers and advances. A dozen barrels are levelled at him and at length he sinks to the ground, hurling his last shaft at the foe as he falls. The loss of their leader was decisive and the savage warriors melted away, the Europeans following them up with scattered shots from which a few more of them fell.

When the troopers returned to the battle-ground, the old chief was still alive. As they approached, he raised himself on his elbow, and after looking in vain for a weapon, spat, with all the savage contempt of his race at the victors, then sank back with an abusive epithet on his lips and died. Had his colour been white, and had he so fallen at Bannockburn or Hastings, or any other famous fight for fatherland in the old world, his name would ring in the ears of posterity ; but being a mere Australian savage, who died fighting against our religion and civilisation, we can see nothing heroic in that. Perhaps he saw dimly, as many of his people have clearly seen since, and as the American Indian has had occasion to know, that the success of the white man entailed the ruin of the aboriginal race. So he preferred to die defiant and free, rather than to linger on for a few miserable years in degradation and servitude.

The manner of his death affected the spectators differently. The officer who was nearest and received the full benefit of his expectoration, exclaimed, with much disgust, 'Damn the filthy old reptile !'

‘Game to the last!’ ejaculated Mr. Danker.

Grantley and Enfield said nothing, but there was something of sorrow and admiration in their silence.

Corporal Jones (an old soldier) turned the body over—

‘Three, four, five bullet wounds all in front, and as many in that six inches of shield. He got it hot, sir.’

‘Served him right,’ was the general verdict of the rank and file.

‘I believe he is the same old —— who drove that there spear into “Blucher,”’ said Bob, the bullock-puncher, as he gave the body a kick.

What became of the wounded? What can become of them in conflicts of this nature? Some who are not utterly disabled may struggle off and ultimately rejoin their tribe, but others, in a worse condition, are they to be left in excruciating torture a prey to ants, flies, and thirst? That which is mercifully done to the dying brute was done here. . . .

‘Are there any prisoners or wounded of the enemy, corporal, to take with us?’ demanded the Inspector, in calm official tones.

‘None, sir.’

‘Then forward!’

The party now beat the country for some miles round without finding any natives, and it was obvious they had made off over the river. Many dead sheep were seen, and a considerable quantity of stores was recovered in their abandoned camps. Later on in the day, in a large bend of the Murray, the greater number of the sheep were found, and so safe did the whites now feel from further molestation that they divided into twos and threes, so as to thoroughly patrol the country.

In the evening when they assembled at the encampment, it was discovered that one of the shepherds was missing, a man of solitary habits, known as Tom Tibbs. A search was immediately made and his body was found, fearfully mutilated, near where he had been left by a comrade. Whether the deed was perpetrated by a single survivor of the conflict or a small

band of savages bent on revenge there was nothing to show. It was just the deed that might be expected from such an enemy, though scarcely so soon after his crushing defeat.

What could be done but bury the dead? His grave but added another to the many, where lie the nameless ones who have fallen by the way all over broad Australia. In consequence of this painful incident, a more careful watch was kept that night and for several nights afterwards, but the last had been seen of the foe.

'We will remain with you to-morrow,' said the Inspector, 'and take a final look round, in case the natives have collected and want another brush. It will give you a chance of finding any stray sheep.'

'Thanks,' replied Enfield. 'Your proposal exactly falls in with our wishes. We have nearly made up our numbers and are far more fortunate than we dared to anticipate, and feel deeply indebted to you and your troop for a great service rendered in the hour of need.'

'Say no more; I should doubtless have had the same duty to perform in any case, though I am none the less pleased to have proved of use to you. I flatter myself that future drovers will be little troubled by the savages.'

The next morning a count of the flock was made through 'a break' of boughs, with satisfactory results.

'More than I expected when looking over them last night,' said Grantley. 'I would have accepted a bigger loss when we cut and ran the other day.'

'A score or two of d——d *jumbucks* don't matter much,' growled the bullock-driver; 'it's poor Blucher and Duke I'm thinking about, the best pair of polers on this side.'

'Never mind, Bob, you won't have much of a load,' said Roland.

'That ain't it; it's them bullocks bein' killed like that, and me leavin' them to it. What chance had they, tell me that?'

'Not the ghost of a chance, nor would you if you had stopped to take them out.'

'All the same it was a cowardly, mean action to unhitch the leaders' chain and not wait to pull out the pole-pin. I'd have done it, only the d——d fool, Blucher, wouldn't back.'

'Then it served Blucher right,' said Roland, 'to be left to his fate.'

'How could he,' snarled Bob savagely, 'when a bloody black fellow was jobbing a big spear into him behind?'

'I daresay poor Blucher found it difficult, Robert; but don't trouble about it; you did right well to save the others.'

Somewhat mollified, Bob the Puncher departed to his work, muttering—

'I took it out of them —— niggers to-day, anyhow; every shot I fired I said, This is for Duke and Blucher.'

From the above remarks it will be seen that the bullock-driver was a profane person; yet he meant nothing by it, nor was he unkind, much less inhuman, at bottom. The animals of his team he certainly would 'wallop,' and sometimes almost flay alive when exasperated by their disobedience or dereliction from duty; but let any one else, even his master, try to strike them, and Bob resented it like a blow at himself.

During the day more sheep were found, making up the total to within five hundred of the original number. No blacks had been seen, and it was evident they had completely left the locality. Their loss had been very heavy, and utterly discouraged and demoralised they fled, never more to meet the white man in open battle. Unable to comprehend the power of his powder and ball, they had experienced their deadly effects in the deaths of their bravest and best warriors. A small band of the strangers had defeated their whole strength without the loss of a single man. Surely the Evil One, who smote them with sickness and sent the terrible droughts, had also cursed them with the 'Borees,' who killed men from a greater distance than a spear twice thrown could reach.

There was weeping and wailing for many nights in the

camps of the tribe, and many were the rites practised and curses invoked to blast the white man. All in vain, powerless as their weapons against the strangers' gun, fruitless as the cries that went up from the bereft women and children. Poor people, evil times have come upon you, and your race is doomed to quick extinction.

Recking nought of this (for when does the all-absorbing Briton linger to seriously think of what ultimately becomes of those he dispossesses?) our friends camped together for the last night.

'We shall take our kidney-fat back to the Protector,' said Mr. Danker; 'and better news for him still, a tolerably complete pacification of the Rufus tribe. I am sorry it is so complete in one sense, for I wished him to have a hand in it. He will now be able to write the most satisfactory reports to the authorities respecting the conduct of the aborigines under his charge, as the result of the humane system organised by the Government. But I expect, Mr. Inspector, too much prominence won't be given to the particular part of it to which their quiet condition can be directly attributed.'

'Don't be too sarcastic,' replied the Inspector, laughing, 'or we may positively get to dislike you.'

'Under that dire threat I must refrain, since we have to travel some days together yet. Touching that old screw of yours, Grantley, at Moorundie, no doubt quite broken down by the abominable way in which you rode him through that dreadful journey, what will you take for him?'

'If I wanted to part with him, there is no man I should like to have him sooner than you, Danker; but where I go there goes the Star.'

'Thank you, my boy, if you would have sold a horse like that you ought to be kicked. Now I will seek my virtuous couch beneath this bush, and, Inspector, when next you want volunteers to enforce your gospel, "the humane system" I mean, you need not apply to me. The subsequent reflections are not conducive to perfect repose. Thank Heaven, I have neither a Blucher nor a Duke to avenge!'

Early the next morning the two parties separated—the police, accompanied by Danker, to return to Adelaide, the overlanders to crawl along with their flocks.

Said Mr. Danker to Grantley, as they shook hands, ‘If the Star is missing when you reach Moorundie, don’t blame me; the Inspector has an eye on him.’

‘Depend upon this,’ retorted that worthy, ‘that Mr. Danker shall have no opportunity of “lifting” him.’

‘Well, if I got two minutes’ start I’ll be hanged if all the horses in the force could catch me.’

‘Ah, but when I am with suspicious characters I watch them too closely to allow of two minutes’ start,’ retorted the officer.

The purposes of this story do not require us to follow the movements of either party closely. The members of the relief-expedition duly arrived in Adelaide, and were highly complimented for the prompt and efficient assistance they had rendered to men in hazard of their lives, and for saving to the colony valuable stock.

On arriving at Moorundie the drovers were interested in reading a full and particular account of their defeat by the blacks and the consequent loss of all their property, also a sensational relation of the wonderful ride by Mr. Grantley, the march of the police to the rescue of the whites at Lake Bonney, and the subsequent recovery of the sheep and stores. A few lines were then devoted to the repulse of a determined attack made on the party by the bloodthirsty savages, in which some of their lives were unavoidably taken.

‘And that’s all that will be publicly known about how we settle Australia,’ said Grantley, somewhat bitterly. ‘We piously shut our eyes to the big slaughters, and cry aloud in horror if a squatter or drover, in defence of his life or property, kills a single nigger.’

The affable Protector was most kind, and congratulated them on their fortunate escape and the recovery of the sheep.

‘I believe,’ said he, ‘that the recent expedition will put an end to the attacks by that tribe. I have sent emissaries

from the friendly natives to tell them that any future disturbance will be punished in a similar manner.'

'I am afraid, sir,' replied Roland, 'that the "humane system" is, after all, a system of terror.'

'Say, rather, one inspiring a salutary awe of authority, which really is the only way to govern savages. To instil our ideas of right and wrong into them, while at the same time we are despoiling them of their country, is, I admit, a somewhat difficult task, that would defy the missionary zeal of an apostle Paul, even if he could be induced to undertake it.'

The Star was in perfect condition and, no doubt, very pleased to meet his master and his old equine friends again. At any rate, the usual horsey signs of recognition were freely displayed by him.

A fortnight later the long journey terminated, after occupying over six months, by the arrival of the party at Encounter Bay, all in good health except Enfield. His wound still caused trouble, as it had not yet properly healed. He was taken in at Talkie to be nursed and made much of. And so ended one of the most eventful of the overland expeditions of the early days.

## CHAPTER XX

### ROLAND MISSES HIS CHANCE

ENFIELD made rapid progress towards recovery under the careful nursing of the ladies of Talkie House. At first Miss Grantley considered the case so important that her special attention was necessary, but as the patient improved she surrendered her charge to the care of Miss Maria, greatly to Enfield's satisfaction, as well as, apparently, to that of the young lady herself.

'Take care, young woman,' said her brother in a bantering tone, 'or the wounded hero will find his way to your tender heart.'

'What nonsense you talk,' cried the maiden, with a

flaming face, probably the effect of the weather. 'I declare Joan shall attend on your friend if you say another word.'

'Perhaps it would be safer,' he replied, with a roguish twinkle in his eye, 'but then we may have two tender hearts in trouble. Still, if you prefer it, let Joan look after him.'

Maria did not wait to continue the discussion, but Roland noticed that her attentions to the wants of the patient were in no way relaxed. The presiding genius of the family doubtless approved, he thought, by which he of course meant his aunt; otherwise steps would be taken to limit, if not entirely to put a stop to the fair one's assiduous attendance.

Miss Grantley had not alluded to the Cleeves since his return, beyond a passing remark, 'that the pretty daughter would probably now go out to service to support herself and her father, and so lead a useful life.' At which observation Roland ground his teeth, but attempted no reply; he had been taught by previous passages of arms that silence was his best course.

'The old cat has determined to separate me from Pet, but she never shall, while I love her and she will stick to me. I am young, so is she; we will love on and wait.'

But though he would not acknowledge it even to himself, he began to realise as he had never done before, the difficulties that stood in the way of Petrel ever becoming his wife.

Darkie had acquainted him with all that had occurred to the unfortunate Headman. Amputation of one leg at the thigh was necessary immediately after his arrival in Adelaide; the other leg was saved, but would be crippled for life. For weeks his life was despaired of, and it was only his magnificent constitution that carried him through, though he would be a wreck for the rest of his days. Auntie and Petrel have nursed him with the utmost devotion. The former, when the worst was over, had returned home, but his daughter had refused to leave him for a day, and had suffered greatly in health in consequence of the trying ordeal through which she had passed. They were now expected home daily.

Roland had been to see auntie the night of his arrival,



and from her he had heard much of the Headman's sufferings and the troubles of the family ; but when he inquired particularly about her niece, he could plainly see that she, who had never approved of the intimacy, wished now definitely to discourage it. She had indeed early feared that the passion springing up between the young people would be productive of evil to the girl, perhaps to both, and this conviction had been confirmed when, with a woman's insight, she fathomed Miss Grantley's determined opposition.

She was greatly depressed about her brother. With tears streaming down her withered cheeks she said he never could be a man again, and must of course give up all idea of taking an active part in the whale-fishery. The owners had been very kind ; they had paid all the costs of his illness, including those of the journey to Adelaide and back ; he was also to be continued in charge of the establishment throughout the year.

'We have saved some money,' added auntie, 'and with my ducks, and fowls, and goats we shall be able to live well enough. It's not that,' said she tearfully, 'but think what a fine figure of a man he was ! I shall never be able to look at him hobbling about without crying. As to Petrel, she will never get over it. She was always so proud of him.' Roland silently pressed her hand and left her.

He was now only awaiting the return of the Headman and Petrel before starting with Darkie to take up country and form a station in the Tatiara. The sheep, with the necessary men and supplies, were ready, and, as considerable attention had been attracted to that portion of the colony lately, he was anxious to be early in the locality so as to have first choice. Darkie was very keen to start ; he said he could go straight to a splendidly grassed and watered tract, far better than any in the Encounter Bay district.

'Having with so much trouble brought the sheep over from New South Wales for the purpose, I don't want to lose the opportunity, you may be sure,' said Roland, 'and we will be off in a few days. Floss Gifford follows almost directly

after us, so that, if any difficulty arises, we can be of mutual assistance.'

'Now the sheep are shorn they can travel long distances,' replied Darkie; 'even by going round the lakes we can be on the ground in a month. A fortnight would do if we could cross at the Murray mouth.'

Late that night Mr. Cleeve arrived, and of this Grantley had taken good care to be early informed. Big Tom's camp was sufficiently near the road for his quick ears to catch the sound of wheels at a considerable distance.

'That one big white fellow come up,' reported the dusky emissary. 'Young lubra sit down 'long wheelbarrow, look out you, mine see um.'

'And by Heaven I 'll look out her,' said the lover.

So that when the vehicle drew up at the old cottage, he was there to meet them. None other than he should help her down, with a warm squeeze of the hand, and as it happened, of the slim waist too, with a lingering, loving glance into the sweet young face, which already bore the marks of sorrow. Then he turned to the man to whom he was so deeply indebted:

'Dear old friend,' he said, 'let me help you.'

'This is kind of you, Rolly, my boy,' and the voice was hearty still, though much of the well-known ring was gone. 'Let me lean on your shoulder and I can get down.'

With some difficulty this was done, and leaning on his crutch and Grantley's arm, the wreck of one of the finest specimens of nature's handiwork hobbled back to his home. Petrel had disappeared; she could not bear to let her father see her weep. Roland almost broke down too, as he mentally compared the strong, erect, and perfect form, a model of the strength and beauty of manhood, that he remembered so well, with the marred creature before him. One limb was gone, its fellow misshapen and dwindled away; the broad, square shoulders were rounded and shrunk; the great arms had lost flesh and muscle too; and the jovial face was thin and pain-worn. No wonder that the young man turned aside that he might not show the tears that would come.

'Well, auntie, I am glad to be back again, what is left of me,' said Cleeve, with a piteous affectation of gaiety, 'the road is long for a cripple, and the stumps have shaken me.'

'Have some supper, brother,' said the old woman, 'and Roland must join thee.'

'Ay, and the little girl; it will be like old times, and you must tell me, Rolly, about your trip. The blacks nearly did for some of you this time.'

Presently Petrel came in, and sat down quietly close to her father, and the party grew even almost merry.

'I am better already,' said Mr. Cleeve, 'the sea-air does me good as well as the sight of thee, sister, and Rolly in his old place. You, little lass, will grow quite hearty again.' But he soon tired, and went to bed.

'Only a few moments, to-night, my Pet,' whispered her lover, but the minutes grew to an hour before they reluctantly parted. How could he tear himself from those clinging arms and the witchery of the dark blue eyes that never had looked so full of love before? When they parted, he had promised that for a week he would defer his departure and spend every evening with her.

Regardless of Darkie's expostulations and Miss Grantley's frowns and innuendoes, nearly the whole week was spent in the society of Petrel. Again they renewed their rambles over the rocks and the Bluff. They rode together, she mounted on the Star, who seemed proud of the light burden he bore, as he flew along the hard, level beach. With streaming eyes she showed him the spot on which she stood on that memorable, dreadful day, and watched the struggle with the whales that ended in the awful accident to 'dear old dad.'

It was a week in which his future happiness hung in the balance; when a love, priceless in its truth and purity, was his to bind to him for ever. He had put from him, for the time, all ignoble thoughts and considerations for the future, or, if he ever remembered the price he might be called upon to pay before he could make Petrel his wife, the thought was cast aside, as a thing not to be endured in this season of joy.

And when the last night came and she lay weeping in his arms, while his eyes aflame with the passion that surged through his veins looked into hers, she felt that she could deny nothing to a love that seemed so true and deep ; he was her hero without whom life would be shorn of all its brightness. Why linger over the lovers' parting ? Those precious moments can never be forgotten to the latest day of existence. They will often be recalled by the storm-tossed man in the silent watches of the long sleepless nights with a vain remorse, and yet thought of so tenderly by him and cherished as the nearest approach to perfect bliss to which mortal can attain. Ah, however he may look back upon it, he then stood at his highest, loved alike and loving ; and, if in later days he could have always thought as much of her and as little of himself as he did then, life would have assumed its brightest hues for both of them. If he could but have caught a glimpse of the warp and woof of destiny the three Weird Sisters were weaving for him even then, he would surely have turned again to the Headman's bedside and claimed her as his bride ; but he hesitated and then strode away. Fool ! you have missed the chance, that comes but once to the most fortunate of men. When they meet again, he will be stained with crime and his heart hardened, even to her, with pride and selfishness.

## CHAPTER XXI

### GATHERING CLOUDS

IN what is now known as the South-East District of South Australia, on the bank of a pretty creek, there was, at the period we have now reached, an encampment. A small one it was, it is true, consisting of only two tents with a fire burning before each, nearly between them standing a cart, such as drovers used to carry necessary supplies, which was still only partially unloaded, though there was other evidence to show that the settlement was intended to be permanent. Two



MURRAY RIVER





yards for sheep had already been erected, and stronger proof still of a determination to remain was the frame-work of a hut close by the side of the stream. At this one man was hard at work, while a little way off was a bullock team driven by another laboriously dragging a dray loaded with timber for the same building.

It is evening, and from opposite directions two flocks of sheep may be seen approaching attended by their shepherds and the inevitable dog. A horseman, leaving them, rides up to the workman at the hut. There is no mistaking the horse, with the pure white star shining in the centre of the wide forehead. As the rider comes up, he springs lightly to the ground, removes the saddle, carefully wipes the heated back, and then leads the horse to the creek and as carefully washes it down. Adjusting the hobbles after rubbing the sinewy fetlocks with his hand, he takes the bridle off with the words—

‘You know where the mob is, old boy,’ and this the Star evidently does, for he moves off in the right direction at once.

‘Well, Darkie,’ says Grantley, as he again draws near the builder, ‘you are getting on well with our future habitation, and I shall be able to bear a hand myself to-morrow. The sooner it is done the safer we shall be. Lawn’s people have been threatened by the black wretches, they tell me. By-the-by, we thought they had located themselves twenty miles away, but it’s not more than fifteen. Coming back I called on Floss ; he has fixed on a nice situation, and says the country is good ; but none like ours, thanks to your early acquired knowledge, when you roamed these glades and woods a native warrior. Young Lawn says the blacks showed up one evening and demanded various articles, principally tomahawks, pipes, and tobacco. They evidently know how to smoke. Of course, remembering our compact, I did not say so, but probably they owe that accomplishment to you. At daylight next morning they appeared again in a blustering manner and, to judge from their signs and gestures, they were going to play old gooseberry and break things, so a few shots were fired ; not at all unlikely a great many, as young Lawn

is a decided fire-eater. Since then some sheep were cut off in thick scrub, and, when they were recovered, at least a score of them had their legs broken, no doubt to enable the noble savage subsequently to obtain the meat at his leisure. This they did, for the whites were unable to drive the poor brutes, and had to leave them to be brought in by the dray on the following day ; and, when it went for them, they were gone.'

Darkie's face grew grave. 'It's a bad beginning,' said he, 'the only way with these fellows is to keep them at a distance, at any rate for a time. That wreck business taught them the value of our tools, and gave them a taste for tobacco. Then again they had no difficulty in that collision with the whites, and naturally despise us as fighters. We shall have to teach them differently before they will feel a proper respect for us.'

'Then you expect that we shall have to fight them yet ?' inquired Grantley.

'I do, but very likely not here at the station, though that is possible enough. They will be on the watch for the sheep as they were at Lawn's, and, when they are followed up, if in good cover, they will show fight, and then they are not to be despised, particularly where water is about, and they can sink themselves among the reeds until a favourable chance offers of doing for you.'

'It's a charming picture you paint for a peaceful man to contemplate ; lurking black devils waiting on land or in the water to spear the unfortunate owner, after breaking the legs of his sheep and making them of no further possible use to him.'

'You are a good-plucked one,' said Darkie, 'and may as well know the whole truth at once, but that you did before I spoke.'

'So I did ; how could it be otherwise after the many long talks we have had together, when discussing the question of coming here at all ? Now that we have come, however, I am not going to allow the aboriginal possessor of the soil, whatever his rights may be, to break my sheep's legs with impunity ; much less my own. By-the-by, there is that amiable epicurean



taste you say they cherish for the white man's internal fat ; kidney fat, wasn't it ? For anointing purposes only, let us hope. Do they think it imparts a peculiar gloss to their black hides, much admired by the aboriginal gentle sex ? '

' I don't know,' answered Darkie, ' perhaps it is all a myth. Certainly such a craving can only be recently acquired, as their acquaintance with our race is as yet only of brief duration.'

' Ah yes, yours was the first introduction, and the closest scrutiny by the keenest eye among the native epicures could never have detected any fat, internal or external, about you. It comes to this then, that, if their brutal instincts have been gratified at all, it has been at the expense of my poor companions of the *Mary*.' And with a frown on his brow, he added in a low voice, ' If we do come into collision, " God do so to me and more also," if I do not requite it.'

His companion looked at him. Was that a smile of satisfaction that appeared for a moment on his face ? If so, it passed off without being noticed.

At this early period in the history of the colony, a considerable settlement took place in the south-east districts. Enterprising young men taking their lives in their hands drove their flocks before them on to the tracts of country they desired to occupy. In this they were encouraged by the Government, all parties hoping that collisions with the blacks would be avoided. On the broad expanse of territory there seemed room for all, and no one really understood that the natives were divided into many hostile tribes, which utterly refused to enter into friendly relations with each other, or to permit any encroachment on their respective domains.

As to providing any protection for the settlers, that was quite impossible. How could a few police control the numerous tribes scattered over the enormous area which was, even at that time, in course of occupation by the energetic Europeans ? They were, indeed, principally engaged in keeping order among the lawless whites, who were scattered over the more settled districts, and who, indeed, required much

supervision for the protection of the law-abiding. In such duties the mounted police of that time were most efficient. They were splendidly organised and officered; they were almost ubiquitous; and to them the colonists were indebted for the tranquillity that prevailed.

It is difficult even now, with the light of past experience to guide us, to understand what could have been done to prevent the bloodshed between the squatters and the aborigines. The latter were too numerous, as compared with the former, and too confident in their power of resistance, to submit without a struggle to be deprived of even portions of their country, while their cupidity was, of course, excited by the stranger's riches. Later, undoubtedly, much might have been done by the judicious reservation of extensive tracts of territory, and by partially stocking them under white supervision for the sole use of the people who were dispossessed. Nothing of the kind, however, worthy of mention was ever attempted, and until each successive tribe, which had been come in contact with had dwindled down to a few individuals, they and the occupiers of their land had virtually been left to settle the matter between them.

Certainly, as we have already seen, a Protector of Aborigines was appointed even in the early times, but his powers were, in practice, extremely limited outside the districts immediately surrounding the capital. The more enterprising squatter who struck out into the *terra incognita* beyond was out of reach of these influences and whatever protection they afforded.

Being, however, still amenable to the laws governing the whole community, he could only legally proceed in the usual way against the native aggressor, who stole his sheep, speared his cattle, robbed his huts, or threatened or maltreated his employés. To take out a summons or warrant entailed hundreds of miles of hard riding and days of absence from his business, first to obtain the authority, and then to find an officer to execute it. That done, what then? The black delinquent was in his native wilds, neither to be found without

great difficulty, nor to be identified to the satisfaction of the law, if found. Meantime, encouraged by impunity, the aggressor went on ; until in defence of his property, or even of his life, the squatter took the matter into his own hands, and with powder and ball effectually protected both. Often when exasperated by losses and by the wanton destruction of his animals, or in fear of his own life and the lives of those depending on him, he too gave rein to the brutal instinct of slaughter that seems inherent in man, and then it simply came to be a question of the survival of the fittest.

Men who in the ordinary vocations of life were kind and humane have often been heard to sum the subject up in the terse remark : ' The black man must go under ' ; and by this they meant that he must ' go under ' in the most summary manner known to our race, which does not admit of much time for the slower, though not less sure, process of civilisation to work his destruction.

The characters sketched in this story were in the position referred to in the preceding remarks : far from the settlements, surrounded by some of the fiercest of the native tribes of Australia, and entirely dependent upon themselves. It is not to be wondered at if, under these circumstances, deeds were committed at which humanity shudders. It is generally assumed that the blacks were the aggressors. No doubt they were so, by stealing sheep and cattle ; but that was in retaliation for their country having previously been taken possession of, and in this respect it cannot be disputed that the white man was the aggressor.

The first settlers were, of course, the first to be attacked, but the trouble soon spread. The Lawns had vigorously defended themselves and their property, and for a time were not further molested ; probably they had instilled a wholesome terror into the savages, who are ever quick to observe any sign of weakness in their opponents. These outrages by the blacks had been duly reported to the proper authorities, and after some weeks of delay, a small party of police visited the district and made some attempts to capture the supposed

ringleaders. In a few instances they succeeded, and the prisoners were taken to Adelaide for trial, which ended in a mere farce, as proof was practically impossible. The whites refused to leave their stations for so long a period, and declined to prosecute, or even denied that they knew anything against the prisoners, in order to avoid the loss their absence would have entailed.

After this little attention was paid to the Tatiara, the settlers were left to their own devices, and for a while the blacks, though always troublesome, made no serious attacks. As more country was taken up by new settlers, things grew worse, and an outrage of a peculiarly atrocious nature was committed at a lately formed station, not far from Grantley's. Reprisals followed, and it became evident that the whole of the aborigines in the neighbourhood were in a state of agitation. Petty thefts of stores or sheep were frequent; and then the natives, growing bolder, made an attack on a shepherd in the employment of Enfield and Gifford. The man escaped by abandoning his flock; and this was subsequently recovered with the loss of a couple of hundred sheep. Many of the neighbours joined in the pursuit, and were greatly exasperated by finding numbers of the unfortunate animals with their legs broken, as usual.

Being overtaken on the edge of a lake, the robbers easily escaped by taking to the water, and added to the chagrin of their baffled pursuers by their triumphant and insulting jeers. That day many vows of vengeance were registered, to be amply fulfilled on future occasions.

A week later a shepherd of Grantley's was set upon by a strong gang late in the afternoon. He was on horseback, otherwise he would certainly have been killed; as it was, he reached the head station only slightly wounded. As this attack had been preceded by the murder of a man and the driving away of his flock in a remote part of the district, and as every owner had enough to do to protect his own property, it seemed useless to seek assistance. Grantley and Darkie, therefore, determined to follow up the marauders alone, and

to take such vengeance as should deter them from committing any more of these outrages.

Early the next morning they rode, fully armed, straight to the place which the shepherd described as the scene of the attack. The trail was easy to follow by the dead and mutilated sheep, some with only one leg broken, others with two, three, or all four fractured. This continued for about three miles, till they reached the spot where the blacks had camped for the night, as the fires indicated, as well as the remains of more animals which had been wantonly slaughtered.

It was not a sight to fit a man to act as judge of his own wrongs, or to be merciful in the execution of the sentence he had passed. Without uttering a word, but thinking over the many times he had come in contact with the savages and the injuries he had received, Roland rode on. Suddenly, behind some undergrowth, thirty or forty blacks were to be seen, waddies and spears in hand, amusing themselves by killing his sheep; so intent were they, laughing and jabbering over their work, that the approach of the white foes was unnoticed.

‘Slay and spare not,’ he muttered, and after careful aim two shots rang out with fatal effect. At first the blacks made a show of standing, but when two or three more had fallen they ran for the water as usual. Unfortunately for them it was shallow, and the white men pursued, hotly firing wherever a black form could be distinguished in the disturbed pool. Ten or a dozen were killed and many wounded before a halt was made.

‘Let the crippled wretches go,’ said Grantley, as Darkie seemed inclined to follow a few whose movements showed they were hard hit. ‘They have got enough this time to serve as a practical lesson, I think. But why on earth do you want to look at each carcass? Do you expect to recognise some old acquaintance?’

Darkie did not answer, but continued to examine the face of each body they came to; and on one occasion, when it

was the corpse of an elderly man, he turned it chest uppermost. Apparently satisfied, he said—

‘No, I have no particular recollection of any of them, except the old man, and he was as big a villain as men of his colour are made; not quite equal to what the owner of a white skin can be when he tries, but still a very respectable rascal. He is not the man I am seeking, though. Now, what are we to do with all this carrion?’ he continued, pointing to the bodies. ‘Put them all in a heap with the dead sheep and burn them is my advice. We cannot leave them putrefying here.’

‘That would be too horrible,’ said Grantley, ‘if one had to come this way again soon. As there is plenty of wood, we will do it to-night. It may be that their countrymen will take them away meanwhile, and save us the trouble. Now, let us collect the sheep and drive them home.’

This was done, and when the flock was counted the loss was ascertained to be over a hundred.

‘Squatting won’t pay if this sort of thing goes on,’ observed the owner; ‘nor is it an agreeable occupation, when attended with frequent blackbird-shooting on a large scale. Possibly one may become accustomed to the excitement after sufficient practice, but I can’t help feeling that the poor devils have paid too high a price for the hundred “jumbucks.”’

‘What about your companions on the Coorong? Besides, if wholesale slaughter of sheep were permitted, you might as well give up every one you possess at once and clear out.’

‘That is so,’ replied the squatter, ‘and I am not made of the stuff to do that. They will have to wipe me out, or I will accomplish my object.’

In the evening they returned to the scene of the fight to find the whole of the bodies still there, proving that the blacks had not ventured back.

‘I didn’t think they would,’ said Darkie; ‘they have had too great a fright, and will give us a wide berth for some time to come.’

And without the smallest repugnance or concern he began

piling up dried wood, dead black men, and defunct sheep in a heap together. Roland confined his efforts to the timber and sheep, but worked hard, evidently with the object of getting an unpleasant task completed as quickly as possible. A match was applied and the whole rapidly became enveloped in flames, which rose higher and burned more fiercely every moment.

‘Now we will burn the sheep lying further back,’ said Darkie.

‘Need we do that?’ asked Grantley.

‘Decidedly,’ replied the other; ‘we must burn the dead sheep, both to prevent the blacks who have killed them using them for food, as that would encourage them in further depredations, and to avoid a nuisance.’

‘I quite understand, and it is only carrying out a practice I have always adopted in other parts of the country; the sooner we get it done the better.’

When the task was completed, they mounted their horses and rode fast home, like men glad to leave the spot.

‘This is an episode in my life,’ said the younger man, ‘which I hope it will not be necessary to repeat.’

‘For us, perhaps not,’ said Darkie; ‘but I am quite persuaded that it will have to be frequently repeated on a much larger scale before this continent is peopled by Europeans and their flocks and herds can roam in peace over their pastures.’

‘Well, it is an ugly subject for any man to reflect upon, but it is difficult to see how something of the kind is to be avoided, if we Britishers are to continue our mission of going forth “to subdue and replenish the earth.”’

## CHAPTER XXII

### DARKIE’S FLIGHT

REPORTS of the conflicts between the settlers and the aborigines no doubt reached Adelaide in an exaggerated form, though matters had arrived at such a stage that exaggeration was

needless. Once more the authorities took action, spurred on by the fact, now generally well known and publicly condemned, that many blacks had been shot in a cold-blooded and remorseless manner, in consequence of the supineness with which the squatters' demands for protection had been treated.

A revulsion of feeling in favour of the black men had set in, and it was understood that, if a white man was charged with the murder of a black, it would go hard with him, if the case were moderately strong. It has often been thus in the Australian colonies ; at times the settler has scarcely dared to raise his hand to defend his life, much less his property ; though it must be admitted that more frequently the reverse would be the case, and the unfortunate savage would be left practically at the mercy of his enemy.

A detachment of police was despatched to the Tatiara, under the command of an experienced officer, to inquire into the charges and make arrests where evidence could be obtained. For some time the ostensible reason assigned for the presence of the force in the district was the necessity for keeping the blacks in order ; but information was sought and obtained which implicated young Lawn and his overseer, and it ended in their arrest on a charge of murdering a camp of men, women, and children. They were sent to the capital as prisoners under the escort of several troopers, the remainder being still stationed in the neighbourhood.

It soon became evident to Grantley that Darkie had become very uneasy, and he was confirmed in this opinion by the way the latter watched the approach of any stranger, and then found some reason for absenting himself. At last he spoke—

‘ I had better be candid, Grantley. You have never known my history, and I have loved you for never seeking to know it and taking me on trust. Well, we have something more important on hand than talking about my past. Enough that I am a true Bohemian, whose record is not a very bad one, among those whom a paternal Government have sent here for



their own and their country's good. That much you know already, but you do not know that all the "old hands" are in communication with me, and to-day I have heard that the police mean to arrest us both to answer for the little business at the swamp. They have found human bones among the cinders, or say that they have, and suspect more than they can prove. Now, Roland Grantley, I love you more than any man or woman I have yet met save one ; but I love life more, and when they offer me pardon for '—in a low tone, and with averted face—' what I can tell, as they will do, I cannot trust myself. Therefore I must fly to-night, and get out of the country at once. With me away there is absolutely no evidence against you, and none can be obtained, for we acted alone, and no word has passed my lips relative to that matter to any living being.'

In silence, and with a set and stony look, the other had listened ; now he spoke—

' So far you have been plain enough with me, and I believe every word you have uttered. But where will you fly, and how ? '

' By the Coorong beach to the whalers at Encounter Bay. They will help to put me on board an American whaling ship. Many of this class of vessel call at Kangaroo Island. The freemasonry that exists among us will pass me, both at the Fishery and on the Island, where there are many "old hands." As to how : let me have the Star, and, once out of bullet-range, not a horse in the force, or in all South Australia for that matter, will keep in sight of me.'

' It is well planned,' said Roland, ' and shall be carried out. I have money, too, here that shall be yours.'

' That is generous to a man who acknowledges that he would betray you to save his own neck. Perhaps, in ordinary circumstances, I might refuse their bribes, and bear their cross-questioning ; but there is a great chance of a big fortune being mine yet, and I cannot give that up—I cannot tell you now, but we shall meet again some day, when this has blown over. Now let us prepare ; I had an object in keeping the

Star in the stable and feeding him up. My informant tells me that the police will not be here before midnight, because they think that is the safest time to pounce upon us. It is now ten, so that no time is to be lost. First, give me your instructions for the ride ; your head is clearer than mine.'

'It is very possible,' replied Roland after a pause, 'that some troopers may be patrolling the Coorong ; and, if so, you with your jaded horse may have to contend with their fresh ones. That is the greatest danger, granting that you get clear away from here. You must, therefore, keep something in the Star for a spurt near "the Mouth," or before you reach it. Do not push on when the tide is high, as I believe it will be in the daytime, but camp to spare the horse. It is necessary, too, that you should arrive at the Murray Mouth in the night, so as to reach Encounter Bay before daylight for one reason, and, for another, because it must be supposed that you are drowned in attempting to swim over.'

'I understand,' said Darkie ; 'it is excellent so far.'

'On reaching the Mouth you must try and not rouse Old Jake ; it is better that he should know nothing about your movements. We will hope that he is away, as he often is, up at the Elbow with his boat. If not, and you can let it go down the current without his knowledge, do so. Should that be impossible, and you are obliged to trust him, then give him twenty pounds to ferry you over, and start for the Elbow, or anywhere else out of the way, and tell him that I will give him fifty more if you get clear off. You will understand that much depends on the boat not being there to ferry the police over ; that is one important point. Another is, that no trace of you after you reach the river should be found. In the event of Old Jake being away, ride in at once, and mind you unbuckle the reins as you come up. Neglect of this means in all probability drowning the Star as well as yourself, as in swimming he would be sure to put his foot through the hanging loop and drag his head under. The moment he strikes out, drop into the water alongside with one hand on his mane, swimming with the other and your feet so as to help him, and my life on

it he takes you over. This is no new thing for you ; we have often practised the horses in that way.

' Now, pay particular attention. Directly the Star touches land, mount him quickly before he leaves the water, so that no trace of you is left on the shore. All signs of you—that is, of your tracks—must be lost after entering the river. If pursued, it is more important still that you should mount before quitting the water and without being seen. To do this, fling one foot over the saddle and hang thus with your arm round his neck, keeping his body between you and the police, until out of sight. Don't get in a line with the white surf, or they may be able to distinguish your form.

' Then ride on to near Talkie, being careful to pass well out behind the police station on the Point without attracting notice. Dismount in the river Inman and turn the Star loose, taking off the bridle and carrying it with you ; he will go on to Talkie. Then walk in the water to the sea, and along in the edge of that to the Fishery. You will then have left no possible trace of yourself, unless you are mad or careless enough to drop something ; to make sure of not doing so, you had better carry nothing that can be lost. Once at the Fishery, risk nothing, but let them take you out immediately in a boat to the rocks we know of behind the Bluff, where you will find shelter and safety. All this, however, I leave to them. There is one who, for my sake, will serve you, if woman can.'

Darkie had listened with his eyes intently fixed on the other's face.

' It is splendidly conceived, and I will carry it out to the letter. Of the Mouth I have no fear ; the Star will take me through even that. I will at once saddle him and make a start ; it is better not to defer it to the last moment, for then I might not be so sure of getting away without being seen.'

They passed out to the stable, where the horse stood crunching his corn. As he led him out, Darkie listened.

' By Heaven, they are coming,' he whispered. ' I'll go by the back through the trees.'

'Farewell,' said the other; 'and above all remember to unbuckle the reins at the river.'

They wrung each other's hands and parted—to meet they knew not where nor when. With scarcely a sound the horse and his rider had entered the trees; a few more moments and he would be gone. Suddenly a voice rang forth loud and clear, 'Who goes there?' There was no answer. 'Stand in the Queen's name, or I fire!' was then shouted, and this was followed by a shot and the rapid beat of galloping hoofs.

Roland had gone quickly into the hut, and now opened the door, through which the light shone. He had scarcely done so when a trooper rode up.

'Who is that who has just ridden away, Mr. Grantley?' he asked.

'My overseer, I believe,' was the calm reply; 'but what the shots are about perhaps you can tell me.'

'Why did he not stand, when ordered?'

'That you must ask him—if, indeed, it was he; perhaps it was some one else. It is some little time since he left me for the outer station, to count the flocks in the morning.'

The sergeant now rode up at a rapid pace.

'I arrest you, Mr. Grantley,' he said; 'but if you will pledge your word not to attempt to escape, I will leave you at liberty.'

'Thank you, sergeant—that I cheerfully do; but I would like to know the charges. Your little attentions are so abrupt that I might well have been surprised into resistance if I did not know you so well.'

'At present it is the general one of shooting the blacks.'

'It is true enough that I have shot at them several times in my life, but always in self-defence; I should not be alive to tell the tale if I had not. However, I am your prisoner, charge or no charge. I imagine it will only be a temporary inconvenience, which you gentlemen appear to bestow with great impartiality upon a good many of us squatters just now.'

Darkie, when challenged, had nearly threaded his way through the trees at the back of the station and was just about to enter the open. Without hesitation, he turned his horse again into the timber and rode rapidly away at a gallop, regardless of the ill-directed shots. The direction he was obliged to take was not straight, but, knowing the country well, he soon passed out of range of his pursuers and then made direct for the coast, depending on the gallant horse for increased speed, if required. Almost without an effort the Star covered the ground with his even, measured stride, the spring of which was so great that the falling feet gave hardly a sound, while behind him the heavy thud and thrash of the troopers' horses' hoofs echoed loudly. Looking back with a sardonic smile, Darkie muttered—

'You will get tired of this pace presently, my friends. While you, my lad,' with a caressing touch of his hand on the long neck, 'can keep it up for ever, if need be. Easy, old boy,' as the horse bounded on. 'We will let them keep within hail and blow themselves well, under the impression that they may catch us before we reach the beach. By that time they will be pretty well pumped, and on the hard sand we can skim away like a bird on the wing and leave them far behind.'

There were fine riders and horses too among the police force of that day, but, weighted with their accoutrements and determined upon a quick capture, they had little chance when competing with an animal of the Star's calibre, carrying his light, spare, accomplished rider. Unaware of how he was mounted, and deceived by his regulated pace, they believed that they were riding him down, and pressed on more furiously. Now could be heard the roar of the ever-beating surf as they approached the coast, and presently, as the fugitive mounted the sandhills, his figure was plainly seen, sharply defined against the white foam.

'He is going to take to the beach; we will overtake him on the hard sand.'

And they raced on at the utmost speed of their horses.

But the Star was now stretching himself to his work. With dilated nostril and flashing eye, in the joy and pride of his mighty strength and endurance, he swept away ; his rider, sitting easy and low, had entered into the elation of the race.

‘ Catch us, my prince of horses ! they might as well chase the wind.’

They must have come to the same conclusion, for the clatter of the hoofs died gradually away ; then, glancing over his shoulder, Darkie saw his pursuers grow less and less in the distance, until they were lost to view.

‘ We can see a long way on this shore, even at night,’ said he to the horse, ‘ but they are not nearly far enough astern yet. On, on, on, my brave boy ; we must put many long miles between us and them before we stop for our midday camp.’

He knew that among the troopers there were many men who, once on the trail, would never leave it while the remotest hope of running the quarry down remained. They would plod determinedly on, certainly as long as the tide was low, and it might be even later, in hopes of surprising him camping. Or possibly they were aware of their comrades being on the Coorong or at the Mouth, and would hurry on to obtain fresh horses and assistance.

‘ Warily I will work,’ thought he ; ‘ they have got to do with an old hand, up to all the dodges of the bush and the police too. We will cover every inch of ground we can, brave old Star, up to high tide, without taking too much out of you, and then camp. I know where to find water for us both. Then you shall feed and rest, and I will watch. Such was the programme laid down by your master, and wisely too. I wonder he did not shoot me when I told him I should be sure to turn Queen’s evidence ; but what could I do ? Certainly not hang, with such a chance of finding the Jew’s treasure. D——n it, I did think in that shooting business to have potted Talco and recovered the box. I caught a glimpse of him one day, after the sick lubra told me he was about. Well, I must



ST. LOUIS CLIFFS  
RIVER / MISSOURI







give it up for a while now, till this blows over and I can return under other colours.'

When morning broke, no signs were to be seen of the pursuers ; but still the fugitive rode on, until the advancing tide made travelling hard. Then he turned into the sandhills, such as have been described in Roland's memorable flight from the savages. After climbing one and carefully taking his bearings, he rode through the bushes for a few hundred yards to a native well, the water of which was nearly level with the surface. Both he and the Star drank freely, then he took off the saddle and, hobbling the horse, put him to feed on some green grass near. Before leaving the beach he had eaten a few cockles, and now to conclude his breakfast he gathered a handful of *montries*, a small indigenous berry with the flavour of a sour apple.

'I have still a piece of bread left,' he said to himself ; 'that must be kept till later on. No one need suffer from hunger on this coast, unless he is too dainty to eat cockles.'

Then he mounted a high hummock and searched with keen glance for signs of human beings. There were no indications of the approach of the troopers, but it was possible they had left the beach on account of the rising tide and were coming along the lake-side, or winding through the sandhills where he could not see them. Either way would be heavy, so that it was probable that they had camped until the receding water admitted of travelling along the beach again. Feeling sleepy, after about a couple of hours he thought it would be safe to move on a short distance from the well.

'They may know of this water,' he muttered, 'and make for it.'

So he saddled the Star, took another hearty drink, and rode on until he came to another nice patch of grass, where he again hobbled the horse without removing the saddle ; then he sat down to watch him eat. Presently he dozed, or was it a deep sleep ? A sudden movement of the Star roused him, and at the well he could hear the jingle of a trooper's accoutrements, probably of a saddle thrown on the ground.

Yes, by the position of the sun he had undoubtedly slept, in forgetfulness of Roland's warning, and they had overtaken him—fool, utter fool that he was ! But all was not lost yet ; they certainly had not seen him, though unquestionably they knew he was near, from the tracks at the water.

Without a sound he put the bit in the horse's mouth and silently stole off. From a knoll he could see the spring and one horse there, cropping the grass, while the rider lay stretched out by his saddle. It was a grey animal, the best in the troop and the one that had pressed closest in the chase. He saw it all now. They had picked out the fleetest steed and the lightest weight to ride on and give information to the patrol, somewhere on this side of the Mouth ; but where ?—that was the question. If far on, the Star would with scarcely an effort leave that tired animal labouring in the rear. On the contrary, if he fell in with it soon, fresh horses would join in the pursuit. What matters that ? His noble steed had drunk, fed, and rested, and could still defy the whole police force.

He had lingered too long, however ; for the trooper's horse raised his head, and with a whinny acknowledged the presence of his rival. The recumbent man sprang to his feet in time to catch a glimpse of the fugitive as he disappeared in the bushes. To mount and follow, when the quarry is in full view, is the clear duty of an officer of justice, and this fellow possessed the true instinct. But he reached the beach only to see the Star and his rider flying on at a speed that convinced him of the futility of pursuit.

'I must hunt up the patrol,' he said ; 'they can't be far on. What a blasted idiot I was not to follow the tracks first, and spell after ! I should have had him then, with both reward and promotion. Well, I never had any luck. On second thoughts, I should not have got him, unless I had surprised him asleep ; for I'll bet my life that is young Grantley's Star he is riding, the best horse on this side. Come along, Greydog ; I am going to ride you to a standstill, or find the patrol before dark.'

## CHAPTER XXIII

## A DEED OF DERRING-DO

IN less than an hour the patrol was found, and, though Darkie knew it not, three men on good horses were rapidly following his tracks.

‘If we ride hard we must catch him before he can rouse Old Jake and cross the river, even though he be on this famous Star; and, by the way, the journey he has done already must tell on any horse. It has told on Greydog, anyhow.’

‘Well,’ said another, ‘I saw what that horse did on the Murray, where the travelling is up to your knees in sand, sticks, stumps, and stones, to say nothing of mallee scrub to break through. On this hard sand he will just fly. I don’t believe, if we were up with him, that we should see the way he went.’

‘There is a good chance that Jake won’t be there; he will be away with the boat at the Elbow for our supplies, as like as not; and then how is this fellow to manage? He can’t fly over the river, or swim either; the current is running fifty miles an hour.’

‘No,’ said the first who had spoken. ‘No man would be mad enough to try that, particularly at night; even the blacks don’t like it, and never swim it without wading up the lake to get a good offing.’

When again in rapid motion and out of sight of the trooper, Darkie felt almost in safety. It seemed scarcely credible that more police were near, and, if not, what had he, on his matchless steed, to fear from the solitary man on the worn-out animal they had left far behind, almost as if he were standing still. At any rate, it would not be wise to strain the endurance of his horse too much; it was better to have a reserve of strength if an emergency should arise. So he reduced the gallop to a canter, and even then, with his long, even stride, the Star passed over the hard, level sand at a surprising pace.

As the sun sank he reined in and scrutinised the coast behind with a close and concentrated gaze. Was that some object far, far away, on the very line of surf? It might be so; and, to make sure, he dismounted and, walking to the top of a rise, looked again. No; it was a mere motionless black speck. Greatly reassured, he descended and more leisurely resumed his journey.

'Midnight will be early enough to cross the river,' he thought; 'that will allow ample time to reach the Fishery before daylight, and get under cover too.'

Once he stopped to satisfy his hunger on the cockles in the sand, and perhaps stayed longer than he thought, for when he drew the reins together to mount, the Star tossed up his head with a quick, startled movement. Is that the sound of clattering hoofs, or merely the ripple of the spent tide at his feet? The excitement of the horse tells him, even without looking, that the troopers are near, and horse and rider once more dash swiftly away, the latter feeling it to be the final struggle, upon which all depends. There could be no mistake; the awful 'Mouth,' that was a terror to all who knew it, was within a few miles, and the foes close behind him—too close to enable him to arrange anything with Old Jake, should he be there; and perhaps there would not even be time to cut the boat adrift in the swift current. With a bitter imprecation on his folly for delaying by the way, he pressed his knees to his saddle, and leaning forward, gave the Star his head. On! on! and ever faster, on! until he never dreamt that living creature could speed so fast. The river is before him, between that break in the sandhills through which it has forced its course. What had Grantley told him? 'Above all, unbuckle the reins.' Before the thought matures they are torn apart. With a lightning glance up the brink of the stream he sees that no boat is there. Thank God for that! Yet what an awful torrent to stem, and at night, too! He can hear the fierce current rushing on, the fall of the undermined sand sounding with appalling distinctness in his ears. He rides up to the edge of the river, almost hoping yet to find the boat, but it is not there.

He can hear the loud beating of his heart sounding as if it would burst its cell. Irresolute, he nearly draws back. Hark ! the rush of the following steeds along the line of surf is heard. Is it to be liberty, or a dungeon once more, and probably death ? The Star decides the question by a quick plunge from the bank that carries him far into the current. Like a flash of thought the man's courage and coolness return ; he slides from the horse's back into the water, his right hand grasping the mane, and, striking out vigorously with his left hand and both feet, he is little impediment to the brave steed. Down, down, far down the swift, strong torrent they are swept, until it seems that the ocean must swallow them up, so near do those fearful breakers appear ; but the horse smites the water with the powerful, regular sweep of his great limbs, and ever draws nearer to the opposite shore.

The deadly peril of the mid-current passed, Roland's earnest injunctions came vividly to Darkie's recollection—

‘ The moment the horse touches land fling your leg over the saddle and your arm round his neck, so that you put no foot on land, and cling to him thus, keeping his body between you and the pursuers until you are out of sight.’

All this he remembers, and resolves to do ; but will they never reach the other side ? Yes, almost without noticing it they are already there ; the Star's fore-feet are on the ground, the force of the stream forcing his hind-quarters round on to the bank also, and Darkie feels himself in shallow water. Quietly, without a sign of flurry, the gallant animal puts forth his strength and emerges with a snort of triumph from the water and yielding sand, with his rider clinging to his side ; then, breaking into a trot, he passes into the shadow of the sandhills and is gone.

There has been many a brave deed done by the heroes of our race by sea and land, 'mid ocean's storm, or on the field of battle, over which we rightfully exult, and which have been honoured by the rewards and plaudits of admiring mankind ; but few have demanded a higher form of courage than the deed performed by the fugitive from justice on that dark

night, when he swam the Murray Mouth with his horse, the first—the last—the only man who ever dared to do so.

The troopers had galloped up the moment the Star struck out from the bank ; they all heard the plunge and saw the rider on his back ; then they were both lost to sight in the dark water. Intently they listened to the snorts of the horse as he passed on, ever drifting lower and lower down ; surely they will both be swept out to sea. Yes, the sounds have ceased, and almost with reproach they looked the one at the other. No ; the Star's loud snort as he lands echoes over the river, and they just distinguish his form, reflected for an instant against the wet sand, as he breaks into a trot away from the stream. It was only a glimpse, for almost immediately he disappeared.

'The man is drowned,' said one with a shudder.

'That is the end of Darkie, for he certainly was not on the horse—that I will swear,' said the second. 'I could see the wet saddle shining.'

'And so will I,' affirmed the third. 'No mortal horse could ever carry a man over that torrent to-night. He was a good-plucked one to attempt it.'

'Which do you mean, comrade, the Star or his rider ?'

'Both,' was the answer ; 'and I wish I had been in my blankets instead of chasing that poor devil to his death.'

'Well, neither you nor I would have tried it, to escape a charge of shooting black fellows. We can now only wait for old Jake, when we must cross over and follow up the tracks of the horse. Perhaps we may find the body of Darkie, though most likely he has been carried to sea, and may be washed ashore miles away. Now to camp, boys, at the old spot.'

The morning's search resulted in no trace being found of the lost man, alive or dead ; but, from the terrific current running, the troopers were more convinced than ever that he must have been drowned. No horse that was ever foaled, they asseverated again and again, could ever carry a rider through such a broad rushing torrent of water, as

Grantley knew right well when he instructed Darkie to swim alongside.

About midday the boatman returned, and then two of the band, accompanied by a black fellow who had come with Jake, were ferried over with their horses, to run up the tracks of the Star. They first made a careful examination of the place where the horse had landed for traces of the rider, but neither there nor anywhere along the river-bank was there the slightest sign. Then they took in a wider radius, but without success.

‘He has never come out of the river,’ said one. ‘We saw the horse had no one on his back, and there are no tracks of a man on this side at all.’

‘No white fellow come up, only yarraman; that one tumble down long ribber,’ protested the black tracker, evidently quite satisfied of the correctness of his conclusions after the most cursory glance, though, in deference to the police, he made a more extended search. The tracks of the Star soon led down to the beach, but as the tide was high they were there obliterated. No doubt remained that he, however, would make for his old run at Talkie. At the rocks near the Nob, where he was compelled to leave the shore, they came on his tracks again, and had no difficulty in following them. Indeed, the horse had gone almost straight on to the homestead gate, where he had been found shortly after daylight, quietly feeding by the fence.

Though, as experienced bushmen, they had carefully watched, they had been unable to find any trace of a rider. The horse occasionally stopped to crop the grass, and once had turned off to drink, but there was no track of a man, and surely he would have dismounted to drink. ‘It’s all up with Darkie,’ they both concluded, although they determined, faithful officers of the law as they were, to do their duty to the utmost, and proceeded to make inquiries at the Fishery.

‘We shall be expected to search the premises,’ said the elder, ‘and certify that he is not concealed on them.’

Mr. Cleeve made no objection, and stated that, to his knowledge, no one had arrived at the station during the past night or day ; but the whole place was open to inspection. They had better satisfy themselves first and then take some refreshment. As this was not the whaling season, the place was comparatively deserted, only Jack the Harpooner remaining besides the Cleeve family. Jack had seen no one, and, like a man accustomed to the procedure, he took down a bundle of keys and unlocked the outbuildings for the authorities to examine, wearing all the while an air of injured innocence.

‘I don’t think you have got him here this time, John,’ observed the younger trooper.

‘Or ever shall again,’ said Jack, ‘from what you tell me of his trying to swim the Mouth on horseback. I wouldn’t do it for a king’s crown or a queen’s either.’

‘Nor would I, particularly on such a night, with the ugliest current I have ever seen there. Why, the sand kept dropping in by tons, and the horse was carried down to the very edge of the great breakers before he reached the other side.’

‘Blast it, man, then why do you come to look for him here?’

‘Because,’ was the quiet reply, ‘until we find him dead, we shall continue to look for him living. There is sure to be a big reward offered for him, dead or alive, or for information leading to his apprehension, but of course that does not interest you.’

Jack made no answer, and the men, having finished their examination, returned to the Headman’s cottage to enjoy his hospitality.

This they most thoroughly did, like men who had been subjected to severe and uncongenial abstinence, at the same time giving an account of what had transpired at the Tatiara and during the pursuit of Darkie. The meal over, they saddled up and departed to the police station on the Point.



## CHAPTER XXIV

## IN HIDING

AFTER trotting a few hundred yards under the sandhills, clinging to the side of the horse, Darkie raised himself into the saddle, and, going down on the hard, wet sand, once more rapidly pushed on. He had still twenty miles to go, and the night was passing away. He felt, too, that having braved so much it would be worse than folly to fail now that all the real difficulties seemed over. The Star really appeared as fresh as ever after that frightful swim in the cold water, the very recollection of which made his rider's flesh creep. Rather than take such another he would stand his trial, and—well, yes, would almost prefer to be comfortably hanged.

'I am sure there were all sorts of horrible, creeping, slimy snakes and things in it; they got round my feet and neck and on my face too, nearly choking me. Ugh! it was awful, wasn't it, old Star? Yet you did not seem to mind it, you grandest of all grand horses! In each snort you said as plainly as possible, "Courage! we'll do it yet"—if I had not been in too great a funk to understand you.'

Without a pause they sped on till the rocks closed in on the sea; then, mounting to the grass land, the rider drew rein. Occasionally, where the grass was good, he allowed the horse to feed. His spirits were now so high that he could jest.

'Sorry I cannot relieve you of my weight, old boy; it does seem a beastly shame to sit on you, when we stop a bit, after all that you have done for me; but your master's orders were imperative. If I am to be considered drowned in the Mouth, I must not leave any tracks here; the two things would not be compatible. Now, I know where to find you some water; but unless I can reach it from your back I must restrain my appetite for the beverage, which just now would be as grateful as the nectar of the gods, however delicious that mysterious liquor may have been.'

He passed well behind the police station. He had been apprehensive that about here he might stumble on a native encampment, but fortunately there was none in his way. In due course he came to the Inman River. Now for Grantley's final instructions, he thought; and, pulling up the Star, he dismounted into the water. 'Farewell, old horse,' he said, with a lump in his throat; 'if ever man had a good steed when riding for his life, I had, and none could hope for a better!' Then, slipping the bridle off, he turned away and walked down the stream. The Star, as if aware that his work was done, stepped on to the bank and trotted off home.

Feeling as sad as if he had parted from a dear friend, Darkie waded down the river to the sea; then, stepping on briskly in the shallow water, soon approached the fishing station. On the way he had buried the bridle under the sand in the sea, leaving it to be supposed that it had come off the horse's head, probably clutched in the drowning rider's hands at the Murray Mouth. It was nearly over now; how splendidly Grantley had foreseen each danger and guarded against it! It was utterly impossible that they could have seen him land at the Mouth, and there could be no sign since. The only tracks are those of the horse; the staying to eat and to drink are just what a riderless animal would do. Then leaving him at the usual crossing at the Inman and walking in water the whole way to the Fishery—the best tracker that ever lived could make nothing of that.

'I will go to Jack's window and wake him first, afterwards judge what is best to be done; but out on West Island or at the back of the Bluff will be safest until we start for Kangaroo Island.'

With quiet steps he reached the window; it needed but a tap to wake the sleeper; a whisper, and the fugitive was admitted. Dry clothes were given him, a fire kindled, and soon warm food and a hot drink of a potent character were placed before him.

'Eat and drink,' said Jack, 'while I get the boat ready and put blankets and an old sail in her to keep you warm;

you will need them in that cold place. It's better, though, now there is plenty of oil for the slush lamp. It's so big it helps to keep you warm. Mind you don't keep it going in the daytime, or the smoke might be seen.'

Jack the Harpooner went out for a few moments ; presently he returned.

'All ready,' said he ; 'now for the grub part, and as the "Bobbies" are sure to be spying around, and I may not be able to get out to you, I will put a supply in this box. Have you got all your wet clothes, all right ? Now come along, and you can tell me all the news as I row out. I am glad you did not wake the Headman or Petrel. I'll tell them when I get back, but the fewer who know the better, that's my opinion. Fire away, Darkie, with your yarn !'

Jack had got back before daylight, and was busily engaged preparing his breakfast when Petrel appeared bright and sparkling still, but with a more subdued look than when we first met her. He soon let it be seen that he had something to communicate, and in a short time she learned the gist of it.

'The police are sure to be here during the day, so I would not tell your father,' he said, 'until they have gone. If he knows nothing, he can have nothing to keep from them, whatever they ask.'

Petrel had listened with blanched, drawn face. 'I won't tell dad yet, and we will talk more soon,' she said as she turned from him ; and he saw her hasten along the rocks to the seat where she and Roland so often sat together. Oh, my God ! she thought, how dreadful, her lover, her hero, to be arrested and tried for murder. The mere crime of shooting blacks she did not, in common with many of the old settlers, think so very abhorrent, nothing to compare with the iniquity of killing white people. What could they do but defend themselves when the natives attacked them, stole their property, and threatened their lives ? There was nothing squeamish about the Australian girl of that period. But to be put in gaol, tried, perhaps found guilty, and hanged—her Roland—it could not, should not be. Darkie must be got out of the country, even

if she took him herself in an open boat. It did not matter if the craft were swamped and they both went to the bottom, so long as not a hair of that beloved head was injured. Of course Roland had only acted in self-defence and been led into it by Darkie ; she never liked that man, though he had been so kind and respectful in her great distress about her dear old dad. How badly, too, her lover had been treated by the blacks ; his friends murdered on the Coorong, and himself twice attacked on the Murray and now again at the Tatiara. She must go and see Darkie to hear all about the matter, not during the day when the police might be prowling about, but after dark. She knew the way and could go where any goat could ; besides, she would do far more than that for Rolly, even if his safety were not involved ; he would love her all the more dearly for it.

The Headman had greatly improved in health and spirits, though still, as he must always be, a mere wreck of his former self. A wooden leg, by helping him to take exercise, had had a most beneficial effect. He now frequently hobbled about the Fishery and down to the landing with its assistance and that of a crutch, but this or any active exertion brought on severe chest pains, showing that the internal injuries were not cured. He sometimes, too, assisted in painting and repairing the boats, in which he took great pleasure.

‘ I find I am some use yet, Pet, and may be more by-and-by, though I don’t expect my leg to grow again like the crabs’ claws do, worse luck.’

Yet he knew well that his days were numbered, for the doctor had looked grave when he last sounded him, and, when asked for a candid opinion, admitted there were unfavourable symptoms.

‘ I must get my girl settled before I go,’ sighed he ; ‘ I have little to leave her. When I see Rolly again I will speak plainly. I am sure he means well ; who could do else to her ? ’

Petrel kept away when the troopers told him of the chase after Darkie, for being concerned with Grantley in shooting

blacks. 'I will tell her,' he thought, 'when we are alone'; and so it came to pass that father and daughter had much the same tale to communicate to one another. Directly they left, she sought him, and, clinging close to the shrunken chest, explained.

'O dad, this is dreadful,' she said as she told him all. 'I must go and see Darkie to-night; I want to hear about Rolly and what it all means.'

'Yes, Pet, I cannot go, so you must. It is too dangerous to have him here.' Auntie shall go with you as far as the Cove and wait for you there. She cannot climb the rocks beyond, but if any one attempts to follow you she will see them. If the police should be watching round here, your going out for a walk together will not seem strange.'

As soon as it became dusk the two women strolled along the saddle towards the Bluff, often stopping apparently to admire the beautiful surroundings, but really to make sure that no one was following them. Satisfied that they were unobserved, they arrived at the Cove at dark. Here auntie took her seat on a rock.

'Now, my dear, I shall be quite comfortable, and I am certain that nobody can pass me without being seen or heard. If any one does come, your father told me to be dreadfully frightened and scream horribly. I shall also go into hysterics, so that if the intruder is a man with any sense of what is due to a female, and not a monster, he will stop to assist me. Unless you are deaf you must hear my shrieks and can warn Mr. Darkie; then you must run back as quickly as possible. Now, my child, go on; I don't suppose there will be occasion to scream, but if I do, depend upon it some dreadful man has alarmed me.'

'I won't be longer than I can help, auntie,' said the girl cheerfully, and immediately disappeared among the rocks. It was not a dark night, as the bright stars lit up the great boulders and the white surf seemed to add a reflected clearness to the cliff, so that, knowing the way well, she had little real difficulty in progressing. Still she was much relieved, though

for the moment startled, by hearing her name called by the man she came to seek.

‘I knew you would come,’ said he, ‘so came part of the way to meet you. Climbing these rocks at night is not pleasant for a girl; are you alone?’

‘My aunt is at the Cove waiting.’

‘Would you feel more at ease if we talked nearer her?’

The delicacy that prompted the question touched her.

‘No,’ she answered, ‘I trust you, and may have to trust you more.’

‘Thank you; though by my weakness, folly, and crime, I have smirched and disgraced my name, so that I can never bear it again, no woman ever suffered by me, or through trusting in me. Do not recoil from me; I am not altogether bad.’

Then he told her all; the conflict with the natives, and subsequent visit of the police to the district, his conversation with Grantley, and flight; the long ride and awful swim over the Mouth; his supposed loss there, and the after-precautions that he took up to his arrival at the Fishery.

She drew away, and, though she did not speak, her eyes dilated as he told her of the offered reward for turning Queen’s evidence, and his fears that he might be won over.

‘What?’ she gasped when he ceased, ‘betray Roland? you, in whom he trusted? You, who, if he has done wrong, have done wrong too.’

He cowered before her. ‘I do not ask you to forgive me; I know that is impossible. Yet listen. It is not given to all men to be heroes; I wrecked my life long ago, and threw away as bright a future as falls to the lot of any but a few men. Not many years since the most wonderful, the most unexpected circumstances again threw in my way the chance of wealth and happiness. Later I met Roland Grantley and saw he might, without knowing it, help me to attain my object, without suffering any injury himself, nay, by advancing his interests. To know him was to love him.’

‘Yet you would have sacrificed him,’ she interposed indignantly.

'Yet I might have sacrificed him rather than lose both life and fortune,' he muttered with downcast head. 'I was always weak and, under the sharp questions and cajolery of the men of the long robe, would surely prove but as water. It is possible that we might both stand our trial and be acquitted, but the jeopardy is too great. With me away the case against him at once breaks down; there is absolutely no evidence, and he must be discharged. My lot is really the worst; I am virtually an outlaw, a reward being offered to any one who will apprehend me or give such information as shall lead to my apprehension. I am giving up for years, perhaps for ever, the hope of retrieving my fallen fortunes that I told you of. I have nothing more to say. Roland considered everything, and, without one word of reproach, arranged my escape. Almost his last words were, "There is one who for my sake will save you, if woman can." The matter is in your hands; your father cannot help, and Jack will be suspected and watched. Who else is there but you?'

'I *will* help you,' she slowly replied, 'but we must wait a day or two, till some of the troopers have gone. Do not fear, even if a search should be made, they will not find you here, and there is always a boat moored in the Cove, in which, if pressed, you can go over to West Island. If she has gone, we will know where to look for you. Now good night, and expect to hear from me soon.'

'She is a brick,' said Darkie, 'and in a couple of days she will have all ready to take me over to Kangaroo Island and safety. It's not a very cheerful abode this, but I've had worse. It's hard lines, though, that none of the niggers I potted was that scoundrel with the brass box, or I might have had the treasure away before the d——d police got down into the district. Roland would have helped me off just the same, if I had asked him. Now I can't help thinking my chance of ever getting it is a very remote one. Somebody else may shoot the savage or get the box somehow. Of course they would not know what the paper meant, but they'd surely put it beyond my reach. Well, I only hope the ruffian may die

in his aboriginal bed, unless I kill him ; and then his sorrowing people will bury his possessions, brass box included, with him ; and by rifling his tomb I may still attain the summit of my ambition. I'll hope on, in spite of all ; I'm good at that anyway.'

## CHAPTER XXV

### THE PURSUERS BAFFLED

PETREL sadly retraced her steps, once sitting down on a rock with the great waves dashing at her feet, to think over what that man had told her. Why could he not have been true to Roland ? Surely, if both kept silence, there could be no more danger to the two than to the one ; yet it was evident that her lover had weighed all the circumstances and decided on the flight of Darkie. She almost wondered that in the first moment of his indignation he had not shot the traitor down, but then her hero was always calmest in moments of emergency. He, no doubt, recognised that more evidence might be obtainable against Darkie than against himself,—evidence that, if they stood their trial together, would prejudice him, but that would not be admissible were he alone.

It seemed that Darkie had been in communication not only with the white shepherds and others, but with the blacks, thus probably giving the clue on which the police had acted ; she never doubted her lover's motives, and it was for her to justify the trust she was so proud to hear he placed in her. She would tell her dear old dad all, and get his consent to her taking the fugitive over to Kangaroo Island. There would then be no one who could peach. Of course Jack had helped him the first night, but he was true as steel and devoted to her father ! Still, the less he or any one knew of what concerned the life and honour of her Roland, the better. She understood a boat thoroughly, and Darkie's assistance was available going over ; as for the return trip, the wind at that time of year was nearly always favourable, and the run would not occupy more





CLIFF



POINT OF ENCOUNTER BAY



than four or five hours. In the event of unexpected difficulties the old whaler could accompany her part, or, if necessary, the whole of the way in his boat. It was an undertaking that, under ordinary circumstances, the young girl would have shrunk from, but then these were not ordinary circumstances. That she was acting the part of a heroine never entered her comprehension ; yet that which she proposed was a deed from which many a bold heart might well shrink. Oh true heart of woman ! when does it think any task too hard to save the object of her love ?

Auntie was still sitting with the most entire patience, precisely where she was left.

‘ There has been no occasion to call upon my reserve stock of hysterics,’ she said, ‘ perhaps fortunately so, on every account, for it must be confessed that I am considerably out of practice. In fact, only the hour, this wild scene, and the sudden apparition of a man could possibly at my time of life and after my experiences, justify anything so essentially fine-ladyish.’

‘ Oh auntie, you are quite funny to-night ! ’ laughed the girl, almost forgetting the tale she had heard, at this novel aspect of her almost taciturn relative’s character.

‘ It is the peculiar surroundings, child. We might be engaged in the landing of contraband goods, cheating the customs, in fact, which all of our sex think a very laudable proceeding, or assisting some poor fellow to evade the clutches of the law, which is more proper still in some cases, instead of merely being out to enjoy a breath of fresh air. Well, here we are at home again, and there is dad at the door, no doubt very cross, because we have prolonged our usual stroll beyond the ordinary limits. Sit down, my dear, on the bench outside, and tell him all, while I go in and take off my things ! ’

Glad to be alone with her father, Petrel sat down and poured out the tale, and her troubles with it.

‘ Oh dad, I must take him away, and soon. There is nothing else to be done ; you will let me, won’t you ? It is for Rolly’s sake ! ’

‘I know, Pet, and there is indeed no one else we can trust. Jack has been ordered to accompany the police in a search for Salter, who left here for Adelaide. It appears he got *delirium tremens* and is lost in the scrub about Mount Jagged. Jack says they start in the morning.’

‘Then, we might go to-morrow night, dad.’

‘If the weather holds up, Pet ; but it looks like blowing from the west, and that won’t do. I will tell Jack to take the boat out again to the cove first thing in the morning, and moor her there, so as to be handy.’

In the afternoon of the following day the harpooner left with the police, on the quest after the missing man in the Willunga Scrub. The glass of the Headman enabled him to observe the party leave the station on the Point.

‘There they go, every man of them,’ he said, ‘but some may come back. I’ll keep a look-out up to dark.’

‘I’ll start then, dad, if nothing happens in the meantime. Auntie will come to see me off, and if lucky, I shall be back to-morrow night almost before your bedtime.’

‘I am afraid of the weather, Pet—don’t you think you had better wait till it settles?’

‘No, dad, let me go and get it over. I shall always be in terror for Rolly while that man is here. I think all sorts of things—that perhaps the whaling vessel will have left the island before we reach it. I must go, dad.’

The Headman looked grave, as he glanced towards the west, where a black cloud hung over the setting sun.

‘I don’t think it will be much, but your boat is not a big one to face a sea if you have to tack against a head wind ; you must turn back, if it does blow up, promise me that.’

‘All right, dad ! so that is settled.’

When night had fairly set in, Petrel and her aunt started, the former well wrapped up for the cold sail before her. At the point of the Bluff she went for Darkie. As before, she soon met him, and found that he was eager to be away. The boat was immediately drawn up to the beach for the girl to enter.

'Good-bye, auntie, I hope to be home to-morrow sometime!'

'I must pull out a little to get the wind,' said Darkie, 'then we will put up the sail. Farewell, Mrs. Cleeve, I shall never forget all that you have done for me, and what your niece is doing to-night.'

The old woman could not speak, but she waved her hand as long as they could be seen. Outside the shelter of the headland the wind blew fresh, and as soon as the sail was set the boat danced merrily over the waves.

'I will steer for a while,' said Petrel, 'and then you can take the tiller. The breeze is beautiful, and if it continues we shall be there in a few hours.'

'I hope so,' replied Darkie, 'but I don't like the appearance of the weather. This is a land wind, and will die away before we proceed very far.'

'Dad said it might blow hard from the west, and then we were to turn back.'

'That would be on every account a great pity, but I am entirely under your orders,' he replied. 'I owe far too much to you and yours to incur any more risk than is absolutely necessary.'

'It is not for you,' she said coldly, 'that I am here.'

'I beg your pardon!' and he sank into silence.

Round West Island they ran on, till fairly within sight of the grand cliffs beyond Porpoise Head, the wind still holding and the boat making good progress. Then it began to drop, occasionally rising and propelling them through the water at a rapid rate. Presently it would fall to a calm, and the sails would flap idly. So, with fitful puffs, it rose and fell in a tantalising way for perhaps half-an-hour, then ceased altogether.

Darkie now spoke.

'It will blow hard against us directly. We must turn back. To be safer, I will take a reef in the main sail.'

As she seemed to object by her silence, he added—

'It is what your father directed should be done.'

‘Take the rudder,’ she answered, ‘I cannot steer back,—it seems like doing a wicked thing.’

She was thinking that the police might be waiting for him at the cove when they landed. He seemed to divine her thought.

‘I will stay on West Island, if you can manage the boat to the cove.’

‘Thank you,—I can do it easily, I have moored her many times, and directly the wind goes round I will come for you ; to-morrow night, if possible !’

The west wind was now fast driving them back, and she again took the tiller while he prepared what he would require on the island. She had quite recovered her cheerfulness.

‘You won’t mind being left, will you ? I could not stop, you know ; the boat might be seen from the land.’

‘Of course, you cannot, and I would rather be there than behind the bluff. It’s a great deal safer, which to a man in my position counts for something. Still, if I thought there was any doubt about your being able to manage the boat I would go on, even against your will.’

‘But I have none,’ she quickly answered ; ‘my father has often said that I can manage a boat as well as he can, and after my sailing about with him every summer when the whaling is over he ought to know.’

They were now near the landing-place under the shelter of the island. It was simply a little indentation in the pile of rocks where the water was somewhat calmer. With skilful hand the girl steered close to a flat rock, and as the boat passed on a swell, Darkie sprang on to it. When he turned to look, Petrel was out in the open sea, speeding directly round the bluff. He lifted the bundle he had cast before him, and climbed up the rocks, and then followed with his eyes the white sail until it disappeared beyond the headland.

‘There never was a girl like her,—good and beautiful, with the spirit of a heroine. I wonder if I ever, from my cradle upwards, have for one single instant been worthy of her. As for Roland, does he realise what a prize is within his grasp ?

Not he, or, if he does, his infernal pride of name and race will likely enough prevent his ever plucking it. It is easy to see that his old aunt is working on that failing to separate them. If she once gets hold of how the father left England, then, Petrel, you will surely find that your idol has feet of clay, like the rest of us. It won't matter that through your aid he has escaped by the skin of his teeth from conviction of a crime, compared with which that of your father was as a feather's-weight to yon mount. Fool that I am, in no case could she ever be mine.'

Without a tremor in her brave little heart, the girl steered straight on under the shadow of the great bluff, the surf beating loudly against its everlasting base and tossing its white feathers high up the glistening rocks. The wind was strong, though steady, and the sea was rising to a storm, as she swept round into the shelter of the cove. Here there was no difficulty in managing the boat. She steered close up to the shears before taking down the sail. Auntie was on the shore, evidently on the watch, and in a few minutes she had the boat moored, and was with her.

'I left him on the island. We thought it best, and he wished to stop. It blew too hard for us to go on, though I could have cried at turning back.'

'It's nearly a storm outside now. Come home, dear, and have some nice supper and a good sleep, and forget all about the botheration men,' said the matter-of-fact widow, 'that's the best thing to do.'

Brave little Petrel was glad to be petted and made much of by both father and aunt. The Headman was proud to hear how well she had managed the boat. He also thought leaving Darkie on West Island a wise step.

'It's a nasty landing, Pet, in rough weather, and I would not have cared about it myself a dirty night like this.'

'We were back there, dad, before the sea had risen much, and Darkie acted splendidly; he had everything ready, and, as the boat came up to the landing-rock, he jumped on it, and sent her flying out to sea again.'

‘He is a good hand in a boat, and so is my Pet,’ said the father, fondly stroking her luxuriant hair as she nestled up to him.

The next day the storm had passed off, and the wind gradually died away, though there was a considerable sea still on.

‘There is sure to be a fair wind to-night,’ said Mr. Cleeve, ‘and the sea will go down. This time you must have fine weather, if I know anything about it. There is a trooper patrolling about, though; he has been along the Waitpinga Road and came back by Porpoise Head and the Bluff. He will be here directly. I hope Darkie is lying close on the Island or he might be seen. It will be well to get him away. I begin to think these fellows suspect something.’

The policeman now rode up to the cottage, and, dismounting, sat down for a chat with the Headman.

‘No news of Salter?’ asked the latter, after some desultory conversation.

‘No,’ was the reply. ‘I came back last night, and left them on his tracks near Mount Jagged; but it is very hard to follow them. He had thrown off all his clothes, as we found them scattered along his trail. It’s doubtful if he is alive by this time, and maybe we shall not find him at all in that thick scrub. Do you believe in ghosts?’ suddenly asked he.

‘In the daytime I don’t,’ said the Headman; ‘but at night, particularly about midnight, and when I am near a churchyard, I do.’

‘Well, we tracked Salter during the day close past a big stone lying by the pad on Mount Jagged, and by the footmarks we could see that he had sat down on it. Somehow we got a bit solemn while there, perhaps because there were drops of blood on it. My mate, Birt, said it looked as if the poor devil had tried to kill himself while sitting there. Well, when I left them to come back home it was dark before I got to the place, and there, as sure as I am alive, was something white sitting on that stone. My horse was that frightened



he nearly threw me, and I was just as much scared, and made through the bushes with my heart in my mouth round into the track again as hard as I could. It was his ghost, and that man will never be found alive. I've got to join the party out there this evening with some grub, but nothing will induce me to go by that stone. Good-bye !'

'Good job he let out that he will be away to-night. He can't be here if he has to go out there,' soliloquised the Head-man. 'They will all most likely be away to-morrow, giving time for Pet to be back with the boat without being missed. As to the ghost, he has got more than a bit of a scare. Maybe poor Salter is hovering about there dead or alive.'

As the evening set in the sea had subsided greatly and the wind was fair.

'Could not be better, Pet ; the worst part will be picking up Darkie, as there is sure to be a heavy swell on out there, but it's clear starlight.'

'I can manage it all well enough, dad. I will have the sail up before letting go from the shears, and with this wind there won't be much difficulty, and with him there to help it will be easy,' added the girl, as if that settled the question.

After supper, to which auntie took care that her niece did full justice, preparations were made for a start. All were in excellent spirits ; everything favoured the trip, and these people never allowed the reflection that they were breaking the laws of their adopted country to trouble them in the slightest degree. Giving a long parting hug to her dear old dad, Petrel, again accompanied by auntie, took her departure. Unmooring the boat and raising the sail occupied a considerable time after they reached the cove ; but, that done, the girl cast off from the stage, and the boat stood out to sea round the Bluff, auntie looking admiringly on at her niece's deft movements. The night was clear, with a beautiful fresh breeze, and the boat appeared to skim over the water like a huge white bird. This time there were no clouds rising ahead to depress her spirits, and Petrel felt confident that in a few hours the man whose presence was a continual

menace to her lover's life would be beyond pursuit. And her Roland would, if possible, love her the more for the dangers she was daring for his sake, though they were nothing compared with what she would do if occasion required.

Now the boat shot up to the flat rock where Darkie stood waiting. He had been on the watch at the point of the island to make certain that it was she, the sight of the trooper on the mainland in the morning having made him apprehensive that the boat might contain police. He at once sprang in, and as they flew on their course he told Petrel what he had feared, though it was impossible that he could have been seen as he had never left the safe cover among the rocks.

Relieved to hear this, Petrel gaily chatted or listened to his tales of past adventures with her lover. Then they grew silent, and while he steered she gave herself up to her thoughts. Sweet they must have been and soothing to the whaler's daughter, for she dropped into a deep sleep and dreamt that Rolly had returned to say that all this dreadful tale of murder and imprisonment was a lie, that he had spared the natives who had sought to take his life, and was applauded by the whole colony as the greatest of its heroes. As he left the court he had been cheered loudly. Hark! she could hear them still! Then her name was called, and there was a sound of waves beating on the rocks.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### KANGAROO ISLAND

'KANGAROO Island is close by, and daylight is breaking,' said Darkie. 'As I don't know where old Kark's hut is, I was obliged to wake you.'

'Keep on inside the island; it is a few miles yet. What a sleep I have had!'

'I am glad of it, for to-night you have the same trip to do alone. Won't you be afraid?'

‘Not I. I shall be thinking all the way that it will soon be over—and,’ she added in a lower tone, ‘Roland safe. And you, you won’t come back?’ in an entreating voice.

‘Never, I swear,’ he replied, ‘until Roland Grantley’s life is as safe as yours from that charge.’

She looked searchingly in his face and saw that he meant to be true. With touching simplicity she answered—

‘I believe you.’

A small bay now opened out, with a hut on the bank and a boat on the shore. They had arrived, and as they drew up to a little landing-stage a weather-beaten man of about sixty years of age stepped down to meet them. Darkie sprang on shore and spoke with him for some minutes, and then returned to Petrel.

‘There is an American whaler lying in a cove a little further along, and as she is in want of hands they will take me willingly enough without asking questions. Kark says she sails to-morrow, and advises my going with him to join her this evening.’

‘Go, by all means,’ said she. ‘The same wind that brought us here will serve to take me back.’

‘Yes; but there is no occasion for me to go until after you have started, and that ought not to be for some hours yet, or you will arrive before dark. You will allow me to see you safely away from here.’

Petrel spent most of the day picking wild-flowers among the bushes that covered that portion of the island, and gathering shells on the beach. She had been there before with her father, and had often seen old Kark at the Fishery. He was one of the oldest inhabitants; there were, in fact, none who had been longer on the island and coast, and perhaps only one or two who had been as long. That he was one of Van Diemen’s Land’s choicest importations no one doubted, but Mr. Kark never discussed his antecedents with anybody. He never even uttered a word as to his life on Kangaroo Island, unless, indeed, his tongue was well loosened by that potent lubricator—grog. To a congenial companion, who

passed the bottle with hospitable rapidity and evinced a lively sympathy with the villainies over which the old ruffian loved to gloat, he sometimes relaxed his customary reserve. How he came there was not known, or, if known at all, only to those of the guild who not merely kept their secrets rigidly among themselves, but rarely confided unnecessarily in each other.

Once that subtle agent which unlocks the inner cabinet of so many men's minds had been used to melt the surly taciturnity in which he wrapped himself. There had been hints of the abduction of native women from the mainland in the earlier days; and as one or two white men had black women living with them when the South Australian Company formed a settlement on the island, more than a colour was lent to these rumours. Old Kark was one of the possessors of this kind of property, and on the occasion alluded to he divulged the atrocious manner in which the unfortunate women were kidnapped.

It appears that there were three men living together on the island, and subsisting principally upon fish; when out in their boat they often saw blacks on the mainland, and after a while a sort of friendly relation was established, fish being exchanged for kangaroos, opossums, or other animal food. It was not long before they also coveted the charms of the aboriginal women, though they were too much afraid to offer any direct allurements. At last it was determined to abduct three on the first favourable opportunity. 'It has been said that "God helps those who help themselves,"' observed the narrator when relating this story; 'but my experience shows that the Devil does fully as much for his votaries.' One day they caught a great haul of schnapper near Rapid Bay, and, observing an encampment of blacks, decided to carry out their project without delay. They accordingly approached the shore holding up the fish to attract attention. Seeing this, the aborigines came running down to the water's edge. The Devil certainly had favoured them, for the men were nearly all away hunting. Now was

the chance ; they paddled close in, sprang out, and exclaiming, ' This is mine,' each caught hold of a woman, tossed her into the boat, and were away before a weapon could be thrown or an attempt made to prevent them. The few black men who were there had not brought their arms from the camp, presumably believing that the visit was for the ordinary exchange of commodities. The white men were well aware that the natives had no means of following them over to the island, and in the assurance that they were quite safe from pursuit they rejoiced greatly at the success of their treachery. The women were taken to their camp, but that very night ran away. A chase ensued, and the three were overtaken on a promontory running into the sea, opposite their country ; two were captured, but the other boldly took to the water, straight across the nine-mile passage. Some say she succeeded in her heroic attempt, but died from exhaustion immediately after reaching the land.

There were now three men to two women, and the two ruffians considered that the odd ruffian who had lost his prize had no claim on theirs. The abstract question of right and wrong did not affect such men to any great extent. To have was to hold, if possible ; but, on the other hand, not to have was to take if possible. Among men actuated by such ethics quarrels were sure to arise ; a fight followed, and the lonely villain, half killed, had to betake himself to another part of the island. Or was he murdered outright ?

The other two, once firm friends, became deadly enemies and separated. It would seem, therefore, judging from its apparent results, that the deed of violence did not quite answer their expectations ; but then this only proves that too much had been expected. That any one of the three died in his bed conclusively proves his Satanic majesty did not desert them to the last.

Petrel was glad when the declining sun indicated that she might start on the return voyage. She felt an instinctive antipathy for the old mysterious villain ; the very manner

of life he led, away from all men, year after year, stamped him as one to be distrusted, if not feared.

Darkie hoisted the sails, and, taking Kark's boat, accompanied her a few miles, almost without uttering a word. Then holding her hand, he said—

‘I do not attempt to thank you, and for me to say “God bless you” would be a mockery; but wherever I go, to my dying day, I shall think of you as the best of women.’

He had uttered the words in a broken voice, and then, with all the reverence of a deep respect, he kissed her hand, and stepped into his boat. She lowered her face, and the boat sped away fast before the favouring breeze. When she looked back, he still stood gazing after her, like some impenitent son of man in ancient days, when beneficent angels were permitted to descend from heaven to warn the sinful and obdurate to forsake their evil ways, after the divine messenger to whom he had refused to listen had left him to his fate.

Almost sorrowfully Petrel steered on; she could not think of his affecting words without emotion; he had been so kind and respectful in the peculiar position in which they were placed. No brother could have been more careful of her, no one more anxious not to wound her sensibilities; for all this she felt grateful. Then came the consciousness that in his absence lay Roland's safety, and a great gladness came over her that he was gone, and that she had only to reach home without exciting the suspicions of those many-eyed policemen. Of course, if they saw her return they would suspect something, and probably would guess what had actually occurred. Was not this wind wafting her along too fast? She feared now that she might arrive before darkness fell to hide her approach; yet the sun was near the horizon, so she checked her first impulse to strike the sail, and steered on.

Down went the sun, and already everything began to look obscure; the bold coast-line even became so indistinct that she shaped her course nearer to it. It was so lonely, too, out by herself on the wide sea; perhaps nearer the cliffs she might feel it less. Was that a shark following? Yes, right in the

wake of the boat. Had she not heard tales of these terrible creatures tracking doomed ships until the end came ?

‘Stuff and nonsense,’ said she, nerving her brave little heart ; ‘I have seen them dozens of times swim miles after the whale-boats and nothing happen.’

She would not look round for a long while, and when she did the monster was gone. He evidently saw that Petrel was not for him, so did not waste time coveting her dainty little person.

By this time it was as dark as it could be with such a clear sky and all those bright stars shining. A moment ago she could count them, and now there were thousands. There was Porpoise Head looming up dark and high. As she passed under into its shadow it seemed to shut out half the heavens and their glorious lights. West Island was now near, and with this calm sea there will be no break on the reef, so she steers inside it. There stands the grand old Bluff, never more welcome than now, after the protracted strain of her hard task. Close under those huge rocks where gleamed that swirl of white water it was that the fight with the whales had taken place, in which that dearest of dear old dads had been nearly killed. She could see, plainly defined against the starlit sky, the granite boulder from which she witnessed the struggle and catastrophe. Just round the corner, perched up on a rock, stood ‘The Cave,’ a hollow boulder wonderfully carved out by nature’s slow hand in the course of countless ages. She distinguished ‘The Coward’s Hole,’ where the timid crawl in rather than walk round on the dangerous narrow ledge which overhangs the sheer precipice down to where the ocean roars in its wildest hundreds of feet below. Somewhat further on is the cavity where fugitives wanted by the police had often been secreted, and where she had been to meet Darkie on the night when he told her of her lover’s peril. Wright’s Island was now in full view. On swept the boat ; there is the cove, and there ‘the shears.’ With skilful hand the craft is brought-to alongside, a line made fast, sails taken down and folded away with all the care of a seaman. Now for the shore and

home. As she passed quickly on, there stood auntie, who took her in her arms for very joy at seeing her back again.

So all was well—the man safely on board the Yankee whaler. Bravo! dad would be so glad to hear it. He had never rested since she left. Here was the cottage.

‘Dad, dear dad!’ and ‘Pet, dear Pet!’ Was there ever a happier meeting? Or was there ever such a girl? Certainly never, in the opinion of the maimed Colossus. He made her tell him everything, particularly of the trip back, his face showing each emotion of wonder and pride.

‘Now that you have had a nice warm supper, go to bed, Pet, and don’t get up until you have made up for lost time.’

As for him, hour after hour he sat there. Surely, hearing of this priceless service, Roland would value her as she deserved, would cast to the winds all considerations of race and position, and take her as his wife in the sight of all men. He had thought of all this when he had let her go with Darkie; had, indeed, almost been glad that the necessity had arisen. Not that he desired to pile obligations upon Grantley, but such devotion must produce greater admiration and love for his child. It was not possible now that the boy he had loved since he saved him at the Mouth could hesitate to claim her as his bride, in defiance of kith and kin. Yet he felt that Miss Grantley was in some way working against the happiness of his daughter. Was it by raking up the unjust stigma cast on his youth, for which his manhood had suffered and must suffer to the end, since for him to reverse that cruel sentence was utterly hopeless? What availed it that he was innocent of the act for which an inexorable law refused to accept as sufficient the atonement of a blameless life? And if he had committed that deed, before the God in whose presence he was so soon to appear, and to whom he appealed, he believed it to be no crime. But what would all this avail, if that woman became acquainted with his sentence and its expiation in Van Diemen’s Land before Roland married Petrel? Nothing. Roland’s pride of race would be worked upon—a pride that Petrel’s father knew was deeply inbred; and, though Roland



might suffer, he would not rise superior to it, and Petrel's happiness would be wrecked. If they were once married, Miss Grantley must accept the situation ; her intense regard for the honour of the family would shut her mouth. He must act, then, as soon as Roland got out of the trouble in which he was involved, as he was sure to do, now that Darkie had escaped from the country. Doubtless he would hasten from Adelaide to thank the girl he loved for all he owed her ; then everything might be settled, and Petrel made happy. Comforted by these last reflections, the big man retired to rest.

## CHAPTER XXVII

## FACILIS DESCENSUS AVERNI

ENFIELD had now almost quite recovered from his wound under the efficient nursing at Talkie, but found it difficult to tear himself away from the fascinations of Miss Maria. It is ever thus when the wounded male is thrown defenceless into the hands of the female beguiler. It is so pleasant to be waited on, and have every wish anticipated with such ready sympathy : and to watch the womanly ways, and wonder what some men have done that they should possess these blessings in permanence while you, a poor devil of a bachelor, have to shift for yourself. It's all up with you when it comes to this. There may be a little fencing, an apparent coldness on the part of the charmer, but she has got your neck in the matrimonial noose, from which you can't extricate yourself, if you struggle ever so hard—and that you will not do. It looks so pleasant—as, indeed, it is for the time being, and possibly may be for all the time that you twain shall be one flesh. We won't pry too closely into the heart of Miss Maria ; perhaps she never thought of the disabled hero as a lover until he actually asked the important question and she whispered in response, ' You must ask my aunt.' Not quite the answer the ardour of her admirer desired. A passionate lover has been

known to be so carried away by his feelings as to hastily ejaculate, 'The devil take your aunt! What do *you* say?'

Of course, an outburst like this would be highly improper in good society, but it is not unreasonable to suppose that the average damsel would scarcely consider it an unpardonable sin. James Enfield was not naturally impulsive, and on this occasion, being discreet, he simply marched the maiden into the presence of Miss Grantley, who was opportunely near, and put the matter thus:—

'Miss Grantley, I've asked your niece to be my wife, and she refers me to you; please give us your blessing,' which that lady did there and then. Subsequently, no doubt, he had a more satisfactory interview with his *fiancée*.

Under these happy circumstances, complete convalescence could not be expected, since that would entail the swain's departure. He was, however, in quite robust enough health to take long walks and rides with the chosen one. . . . It was at this juncture that the Star was found at the gate with his saddle on. There was some comfort in the fact that it was not the one which Roland was accustomed to use, but until the arrival of the police the household was in a state of considerable alarm. Enfield was then informed of the arrest of Grantley and the escape and pursuit of Darkie as far as the Murray Mouth, where all trace of him ceased.

'You may be sure we know nothing of him, and I don't believe he got beyond the river; the saddle gives every indication of having been carried a long distance by a loose horse. It's sodden with water and covered with dirt; then there was no bridle, and as you did not find it on the tracks, and there were no marks of the reins trailing on the ground; it must have come off in the river, which seems to prove that the rider was drowned there.'

'I don't doubt it,' replied the officer. 'Still, it is our duty to search all likely places where he may be concealed.'

A few days later the lover tore himself away and proceeded to Adelaide to meet Grantley, for the purpose of assisting him in any way that an old friend, soon to become a brother, could.



SETTLERS  
HUT  
L. KANGAROO  
ISLAND

PHOTO: CAPTAIN WEIR  
PHOTO: F. W. GILES



It is not necessary for this narrative to enter into the particulars of Grantley's examination. Immediately on his arrival he was brought before the court and remanded for further evidence ; subsequently being committed for trial, but released on bail. The sessions were to be held within a few weeks, and he persistently refused to return home until the case was disposed of. Enfield saw a great difference in him since this trouble had come. He was more silent than ever, and the old flashes of impatience marked his conduct more frequently. Of the crime with which he was charged he scarcely spoke, and he evidently never regarded it as an offence. When he did on occasion refer to it in a general way in discussing the native difficulty and the losses the squatters sustained from it—

‘A great deal of the country is good,’ he would say, ‘and we shall do well ultimately if we can surmount the black trouble, either by being let alone or by the Government protecting us ; I daresay this is only a spasmodic access of humanity on the part of the authorities. When it has worn off, the squatters may do what is right in their own eyes for two or three years, which will be, from what I have seen, sufficiently long to settle the matter. I’m not justifying it, but I can’t see how under our system of colonisation it is to be avoided.’

When the sessions opened, the first case called was that against the Lawns. The evidence was strong, and many thought a conviction certain ; but the jury could not agree, and ultimately brought in a verdict of ‘Not guilty.’ The charge against Grantley was not proceeded with, the Crown prosecutor considering it useless to press it in the absence of an important witness.

‘Any one might have known this would be the result ; but the officials want to give you gentlemen a lesson,’ said Grantley’s legal adviser, ‘and, above all, to show that they do something in the interests of the aborigines. Briefly, it means this : whatever you do, don’t be such fools in the future as to let it get known.’

Angry and soured by the ordeal through which he had

passed, Roland, accompanied by Enfield, started for Encounter Bay. Though at the time glad that the case against him had broken down, or rather had been abandoned, he could not but feel that it would have been better if it had come to trial and he had been acquitted, as must have been the case. As the matter stood, he was practically at the mercy of Darkie, who might be apprehended or might voluntarily surrender himself any day—of course providing for his own safety beforehand. Still, if Darkie were once safely away, there would be little cause for uneasiness. Among his fraternity a broad line of distinction was drawn between giving up a comrade to save your own neck, and coming back for the purpose of doing it for a reward. The latter was a baseness unknown among them. As yet he knew nothing more of Darkie than Enfield could tell him ; but he had little doubt of his arrival at the Fishery, and supposed that news of his whereabouts would be forthcoming there. He did not believe in the story of his drowning in the Mouth ; for if he only kept his head, he felt confident the Star would take him over. Most likely the fugitive was still hidden somewhere on the coast, and the dangerous task of getting him away remained to be carried out. This reflection made the young man grow more gloomy as they drew near to the Bay.

He was getting tired of the whole thing, Encounter Bay and the Tatiara as well ; and felt inclined to sell out of both, particularly the latter, and go far away up the Darling or to one of the other outlying parts of New South Wales, where there was good tenure to be had, and none of the persecution of the squatters that seemed periodical here. Petrel would go with him to the ends of the earth as his wife, or even without his committing himself so far, if he took the old people with them in some capacity, so much did she love him. Then later she might be his without his name being tarnished by marriage with a convict's daughter, or his prospects of inheriting the old title and estate affected. Did he blush as these incipient thoughts floated through his mind ? He had got beyond that already !

## CHAPTER XXVIII

## AUNT ARABELLA PLAYS HER TRUMP CARD

SIR ARCHIBALD GRANTLEY of Grantley Hall to Miss Grantley, Encounter Bay, South Australia :

‘DEAR SISTER,—I was greatly pleased to learn on receipt of your letter that my nephew Roland is so fine a young fellow, and quite free from any ridiculous love entanglement. As this is the case, you are quite at liberty to inform him of my intentions regarding himself. As both he and my daughter are very young, I do not urge his return to England at present, particularly as he is advancing his own fortunes so well in Australia. Perhaps in two or three years he will be more likely than now to commend himself to an impressionable girl. I shall give the necessary instructions respecting the drawing up of my will, appointing him successor to my son, with the proviso that he either marries my child Elinor or some other lady of good lineage previous to inheriting the estate, or within a reasonable time thereafter. I confidently rely upon you to acquaint me with the fact if he ever becomes engaged or married to any woman not fulfilling the above conditions, as I must then look elsewhere for an heir to our time-honoured name and estate.—Your loving brother, ARCHIBALD GRANTLEY.’

‘Hem! hem! Yes!’ said Miss Grantley; ‘I must take an early opportunity of acquainting Roland with the splendid prospects his uncle’s letter unfolds to him, before he sees that young person; as, after so long an absence, one can never tell what absurdity a young man may be guilty of. Heir to one of the finest properties in England, with possibly a title as well, and a really beautiful girl ready to fall into his arms if he choose—that is one side of the picture; a convict’s penniless daughter as his bride—that is the other. Can a man be sane and hesitate? Emphatically, no!—and that settles the question. Now for the letter about the young person’s father. I must be prepared to show that if my young gentleman demands my authority:’—

‘HOBART TOWN.

‘DEAR MADAM,—In reply to your inquiries relative to the antecedents of David Cleeve of Encounter Bay, I beg to state that a man

of that name, no doubt the same from your description of his person, was, when a mere lad, only twenty-one years of age, transported to this colony. The sentence was for life, and the crime poaching. I understand that he was apprehended with a hare in his possession, and his defence was that he had picked it up on the roadside, and that he was going some distance out of his way to deliver it to the gamekeeper when arrested. As a great deal of poaching had been going on in the neighbourhood, and a gamekeeper had been shot shortly before, the charge was pressed to the utmost. Young Cleeve bore an excellent character while serving his term, during part of which he was assigned to me, and was then allowed to leave the colony on a ticket-of-leave. Feeling great interest in him, I took the trouble to verify his statements, and am thus in a position to state that the above particulars are correct. The man was certainly convicted; but that he was innocent of even the intention of wrong there can be little doubt, though I fear it is quite too late now to establish his innocence, which, I presume, is your kind motive in making the inquiries contained in your favour of the 7th inst.—I am, madam, yours faithfully,

JOHN GROTE.

‘MISS GRANTLEY, ENCOUNTER BAY.’

‘It would, perhaps, have been more to the point if I had only received the bald facts from Mr. Grote, without all this unnecessary information as to the man’s possible innocence. I fear I must have expressed myself clumsily, since I evidently conveyed the impression that I made the inquiries in the interests of Mr. Cleeve. Well, perhaps it is better so, or my correspondent might have declined to answer at all, as he is certainly prejudiced in favour of the convict. After all, it is scarcely likely to matter in the least. I have only to say I possess absolute proof that she is the daughter of “an old lag,” and possibly to read over the bare facts, in order to satisfy a man whose mind is already in doubt.’

From the preceding abstracts and self-communings, it will be seen that Miss Grantley had been laying her plans with much care and skill, and that poor Petrel’s chances of retaining her lover against the machinations of so formidable an antagonist were not bright. She knew nothing of all this, however, and trusted on. The man she dreaded was



gone ; Roland was free, and was coming home to her ; what had she to doubt from one so true ? She had been afraid to write, in case the letter might be opened before he was allowed to see it ; no, it was better to wait and tell him the whole story, sitting on the old rock with his arms round her.

Miss Maria, too, was waiting, with perhaps more patience, for the arrival of her brother. She was in a flutter about what he would say of her love affair. Not that he would be likely to object ; indeed, there was nothing to which he could object. James Enfield was his friend and a gentleman, fairly endowed with this world's goods and with excellent prospects. Then, again, she was quite of mature age, and not in a position to fly at too high game, if there were high game within her reach, which was not the case. Altogether, she concluded that she had done very well, and she did not want her brother to make any difficulty. Whether he did or not, she meant to marry the only man who had ever asked her ; though, of course, it would be pleasanter on every account to have the approval of the only male relative she had in the colony.

Having thought it all out, she was quite prepared when the friends arrived to act the gushing, affectionate sister ; not that she did not love her brother, but she may well be forgiven for thinking more of herself at this momentous period of her life. She could see at once that Roland had changed considerably ; always undemonstrative and self-contained, he was now almost taciturn. Still, she was pleased by the kind greeting he gave her. Apparently he was gratified by the loving welcome offered him, as most men who had just passed through such an unpleasant experience would be.

' Say you congratulate me, Rolly ; I have been so longing for your good wishes,' she whispered.

' Then you have them most heartily, sister mine. You've got a really good fellow, better than you deserve ; but if he does not think so, it's all right, and of course he doesn't. When is the happy event to come off ? '

‘ Oh, dear Rolly, we could not possibly fix that without your approval first.’

‘ Now, you little humbug, you know that you would have had him with or without my approbation,’ he retorted in a quizzical tone. ‘ But never mind about that ; you have my fervent blessing on the top of my fraternal consent. The beloved Jem has pressed for an early day, which suits my erratic movements. So hide your maiden blushes in the intricacies of the marriage robes, and hurry them along. I can’t spare more than a month, if I am to be present to perform the important function of giving you away—quite a hollow form, my dear, for you certainly have done that, without my assistance, already.’

Of course the bashful virgin, at a subsequent interview with her lover, made many objections to the shortness of the time and the unreasonableness of her masterful brother. In her inmost heart she was delighted at the stand Roland had taken. There was nothing to be gained by delay in that out-of-the-way place ; no presents, no grand wedding, no church, no bridesmaids, no anything. None of the glory so dear to all women who sacrifice themselves to the ogre, man, was to be hers. Why, then, delay the sacrifice ?

While the lovers were arriving at this inevitable conclusion, Miss Grantley had so successfully manœuvred that her nephew found his intention of escaping to Petrel frustrated at the last moment.

‘ I have a most important communication,’ she said, ‘ to make to you ; it comes from your uncle, Sir Archibald. One which ought to have been made before, but for your absence.’

Then the good lady proceeded to elaborate the advantages of the offer she submitted : rank, possibly a title in the long-run, wealth, and a fine landed estate, with a beautiful girl—a lady born and bred—waiting to be wooed and won. All this was within his reach.

‘ Is the girl an absolute condition ? ’ he asked ; ‘ because, if so, it may never be mine. I will not sell myself for all the good things you have so cleverly and clearly enumerated.’

‘No,’ she replied deliberately ; ‘your uncle says that he will never impose his daughter upon an unwilling husband ; but the principal portion of the money goes with her, and it is his great desire that the money and the land should go together, so that she may continue to live in her old home.’

‘But there is a proviso of some kind, most diplomatic of negotiators—that I can see very plainly. Am I to know at this stage what it is ?’

The lady looked in his calm face and prepared herself for the struggle.

‘Yes, nephew, there is a condition ; but it is one that I cannot think you, with a due sense of the importance of your family, can consider other than most proper. It is that you form no matrimonial connection with any but a lady of good lineage and of untarnished reputation.’

‘Quite a hard problem to solve. What is to be considered good lineage and reputation in a colony like this ? and who is to be the judge ? You, I suppose, as my uncle’s agent ?’ he replied, the tremor in his voice showing that he understood her hidden meaning.

‘Yes,’ she said coldly, ‘I am to be the judge ; but the problem is not difficult of solution, since Sir Archibald has defined his intentions in the following sentence : “No woman who is descended from, or connected with, any one having the convict stain.”’

‘And what has that to do with me ?’ he asked quickly.

‘I hope and trust, nothing ; but we have fenced the question long enough. The young person you are, or rather were (for, when you have heard all I have to say, I hope you will cease to visit her), going to see, is intimately connected with people bearing that stain.’

‘You have either said too much or not enough,’ he exclaimed, his dreamy eyes flashing now. ‘Say on, if you have any more devil’s work to do.’

‘Petrel Cleeve is the daughter of a convict under a life-sentence in Van Diemen’s Land.’

‘How know you this ?’

‘From a sure source—a man to whom he was assigned during the latter portion of the period he served, before he received his ticket-of-leave.’

‘Well, aunt Grantley, your hook is well baited, and, as you are well aware, you play upon a strong string when you play upon my pride. Probably you will succeed, for I am not made of stern enough, or good enough, metal to fling your temptations and bribes to hell, as I ought to do, and think only of my duty to the girl who as far transcends in real worth you and the whole family of Grantleys as the sun does the light of that candle; but, remember, your success will be coupled with my inextinguishable hatred.’

‘Fiddle-de-dee, nephew!’ she replied rising; ‘when you have thought this all over quietly, you will recognise that the only thing for you to do is to honourably meet your uncle’s wishes. Of course you have been extremely foolish in paying that young person any serious attentions. I did not, however, suppose that you attributed such an accumulation of virtues to her.’

‘Do not talk about honour, when you are engaged in so despicable a piece of work!’ he hotly retorted. ‘What has my uncle ever done for me and mine? He let us struggle on in the old world, and die or make our way as we best could in the new; then, when he wants an heir, he thinks of me when I have surmounted the greatest difficulties and can carve my own way. While she—why, to her I owe my life certainly once, and perhaps both life and honour a second time.’

‘I presume you refer to the random shot at the Murray Mouth as the first occasion,’ she observed with perfect composure; ‘but when was the second?’

‘If you cannot guess, I will not explain,’ he said sullenly; ‘but where or how has the supposed witness against me disappeared, do you suppose?’

‘Oh! I understand! Why, drowned in the river, no doubt. I don’t attribute heroic actions or extraordinary deeds to young girls without some reason. To be quite serious, you owe Mr. Cleeve far too much to trifle with his

daughter. Cease to visit there, and she will marry the man who is courting her. A very fitting match, by-the-by.'

This was a last dart, and it went home ; with a scowl on his face, Roland passed out and banged the door after him. Joan met him at the gate with an idea of a sisterly walk and chat, but he shook her off and strode on. Should he go down to the Fishery and get to the bottom of that insinuation of his aunt, that Petrel was not true ? Yes, and if the fellow was there he would turn round and leave her for ever. An hour ago he should have scouted the report as the wildest nonsense ; the idea that his Petrel could dream of any one else, could entertain one thought apart from him, was too ridiculous.

But, exasperated by the interview with Miss Grantley, he was ready to believe anything or do her any injustice. Still angry and distrustful, he approached the cottage, and there by the door stood the form he knew so well. Was she watching for him or that other ? Away with the injurious, unworthy thought ! She recognises the only footstep in the world for her, and with a cry of joy comes flying to meet him.

'Oh, Roland, my darling, you are here at last !' clinging to him in all the fulness of her perfect trusting love. Could he doubt with her dear arms around him and her head upon his breast ? No, the evil thoughts and temptations were forgotten ; he only remembered that he owed her so much and loved her so dearly.

The first ecstasy of their meeting over, she desired him to go into the house to see the Headman, who welcomed him with all his old hearty cordiality. Auntie, too, bustled round to provide some nice things to eat and drink, as if he had never known the luxury of satisfying his appetite since leaving them. Sitting beside Petrel, he talked with the old people in his old cheery manner. Mr. Cleeve listened with delight to the news of the capital. There was, however, by common consent, no mention of Darkie ; that story was left for Petrel to tell. Soon he was outside with her, sitting on the rocky seat, hearing the tale in which she had played so conspicuous

a part. In her sweet, gentle voice she told what she had done, making light of it, and magnifying the assistance others had rendered—dear old dad's advice and encouragement, and auntie's companionship and active sympathy. Holding her close as he listened, the young man's eyes grew moist, and when he spoke his tones were full of grateful tenderness.

'She had saved him from a great peril, perhaps even to his life, for a second time ; and he could never repay it. She was the best and bravest of girls that ever lived'—here a little hand stopped his mouth—'and he would love'—here it was withdrawn—'her more and more all his life long.'

Full of happiness and contentment, she parted from him at the door to seek her bed and dream of her paragon of men, come back to her true as ever and more loved than ever, if that were possible. As for him, he strode home with an elated step, proud of the love of such a woman, of her beauty, of her courage, of her devotion. It was impossible to be insensible to such attributes ; he felt elevated by the mere contact with her, and had no room for any thoughts but of what she had done and how lovely she was as she lay in his arms and told her tale so simply and modestly, as if it were an ordinary thing. He loved her, and trod on air as he thought what a prize he had won in her. Who of earth's daughters would have dared such a splendid deed in the darkness of night ? A thing that must not be known, that would carry no honour with it, that on the contrary might entail trouble, even punishment and disgrace. Yet she had undertaken all this, ay, even risked her good name, for the sake of the man she loved. Forced back by the storm, the intrepid little heart had dared the passage again. He would never forget it as long as life lasted—never !'

Asseverating these words as he lay down to sleep, Roland dreamed that Petrel and Miss Grantley were pulling him in different directions, to the imminent hazard of the dislocation of his limbs ; and he was much concerned to see that the older lady was gradually drawing him away.

## CHAPTER XXIX

## LOVE AND PRIDE

FOR weeks after young Grantley's return and the events recorded, everything proceeded very quietly at Talkie. Miss Grantley recurred no more to the subject she had so much at heart. She felt it would be impolitic, even impossible, to further attempt to drive her nephew to break off his intercourse with the Cleeve family. On his part, he was glad to dismiss such an unpleasant subject from his mind as the desirableness of giving up the girl in whom he found such delight. He spent nearly every evening with her, only returning to Talkie late at night, regardless of the gloomy looks or frowns of his relatives.

Petrel was supremely happy; she would have asked nothing more than that this state of things might last for ever. The Headman, seeing his daughter so joyful, could not bring himself to interfere by demanding an explanation from Roland. He thought he might leave it to the young people to settle and let things drift on. Yet he felt much uneasiness, for he knew evil tongues were busy—how set in motion it was impossible to discover—with his daughter's name and young Grantley's. He was well aware that Roland's relatives, especially Miss Grantley, strongly disapproved of his attentions to Petrel; auntie had even been warned by zealous female acquaintances to guard her niece from the immoral addresses to which she was exposed: that no good could result from such 'goings on,' that her character was already suffering, and very much more to the same purpose.

For a time Mr. Cleeve dismissed these whisperings as the worthless, idle slander of old women's gossip; but now they began to trouble him.

Roland Grantley's station in the Tatiara district was claiming his attention all this time. During his enforced absence Floss Gifford had undertaken the supervision; now the busy period was coming on, and it became imperative

that he should personally attend to his own interests. Gifford also was desirous of a change—not that his physical health was suffering, but he began to think he was entitled to a share in the love-making going on at Encounter Bay. He had seen much of charming Joan, and desired to see a good deal more of her ; but fate seemed to be against him. While ‘those two fellows’ were away in Sydney, he was not too busy to make frequent visits to Talkie on various pretexts, flimsy or otherwise. Almost immediately after their return, however, he was despatched with sheep to the Tatiara, leaving ‘that lucky beggar Enfield’ to be petted and feasted back to health. ‘Confound it,’ he almost wished the niggers would put a spear into him, just sufficiently to make him an interesting invalid ; not through his back, as poor old Jem got it, but into his arm, where Joan might dress it while she sympathised over the pain she involuntarily caused.

Riding about the run with such thoughts occupying his mind, he came to the conclusion that he was a very ill-used fellow, and he’d be hanged if he would stand it long. The natives were now giving comparatively little trouble, the fact being that their number of fighting men was greatly reduced, the residue realising that spears and waddies had no chance with the stranger’s powder and ball—as well they might, after the fatal results to them of the several trials of strength with the whites. Occasionally a hut was robbed or a sheep stolen ; but the wholesale carrying off of flocks had been effectually put down.

To state it plainly, the wiping-out process had fairly begun. Alcohol, different food and manner of life, combined with the loathsome diseases which the white man spreads quite as impartially and widely as he does his gospel or civilisation, would soon do the rest. Not that these reflections materially troubled Gifford’s repose more than that of the other colonists. Still, he would have been glad, in a casual sort of way, if the station in which he was interested could have been established without the destruction of ‘those poor devils,’ just as many squatters have wished since. However, it was no use



grizzling about it ; ' they had got to go under,' and no one could charge him with unkindness to the few left to dwindle away. He gave them many old sheep and the offal of those slaughtered for the use of the station.

In bringing about this general pacification he had borne his part like a man, and been lucky in escaping any ugly consequences—like those into which Grantley had dropped. That unpleasant business being happily over and Enfield worked off, he thought Roland might come and relieve him. He would then go up to Talkie and see pretty Joan. Even if she did not smile upon him in the way he hoped, it would be a change from the everlasting sheep and shepherds. What a delight to feel he could go to sleep without anticipating every moment being waked up and told so-and-so had lost half his flock.

' Hulloo ! What 's up now, you grinning black baboon ? '

' That one white fellow ole Jemmy losem plenty jum-buck ! '

' Now, may all the devils in the bottomless pit take white fellow ole Jemmy and you too, you messenger of evil. I'll clear out without waiting for him, if Grantley doesn't come soon ! ' exclaimed the exasperated Gifford. ' A man no sooner begins to think of a pretty face and gets into a pleasant train of thoughts than he is rudely brought back to the dull old grind by an aboriginal smudge of smut, only bearing some resemblance to a human countenance because it has two rows of ghastly white teeth in the middle of it.'

The black smudge in this case was one of the local natives taken into the service of the station proprietors, as was a very general custom in the case of the young of both sexes, the squatter thus obtaining cheap labour, and transforming a probable future source of danger into an immediate benefit.

Leaving Floss Gifford, however, to search for his lost sheep, we will return to Talkie, to the ringing of marriage bells ; yet not quite that, for bells there were few in those early days, and not many churches to hang them on. For all that, people got married and the knot was tied fast enough,

as each and all no doubt soon found when they had occasion to look into the matter.

The day had at last come upon which James Enfield was to take Maria Grantley to wife, and, as instrument for that purpose, a clergyman of the Anglican Church had been procured to perform the ceremony. Miss Maria had given a stifled little shriek when that irreligious, irreverent young brother of hers suggested that much trouble and expense might be saved by an appeal to the good offices of the district registrar, and, if that were not sufficient, by a subsequent jump over the domestic broomstick. Enfield also thought it untimely jesting on a solemn matter, and very properly insisted upon obtaining the services of the Rev. Jeremiah Jiggs, a clerical luminary with only one feature worth mentioning, namely, his forehead, which was most expansive and even intellectual in appearance, though his detractors maintained there was nothing in it.

There was a chapel in the village—for Encounter Bay now boasted of having become a centre of population—and here the residents for miles around assembled once or twice every Sunday. But for the Rev. Jeremiah Jiggs to have entered that unassuming ‘conventicle’ with the view of performing a marriage service, or for any other purpose, would have been to touch the unclean thing, to commit the unpardonable sin—in fact, it was not to be so much as dreamed of; and therefore the bell over the door was doomed to be silent notwithstanding the joyful event which was to be celebrated. The Rev. Jeremiah would probably have strongly objected to a conventicle bell taking any part in a function at which he was to officiate. According to his ideas, there must be no temporising with those outside the pale of the only true Church. He would be happy to join the parties together in the holy bonds of matrimony in the building of which he was the unworthy pastor; or he would sojourn in the service of his Lord at Encounter Bay, and perform the sacred ceremony in the house of his esteemed friend, Miss Grantley. As for Roland, when spoken to on the subject by his aunt, he

expressed himself to be personally indifferent as to who officiated.

‘I don’t suppose,’ said this highly improper young man, ‘that it matters one jot how, or by whom, they are married, so long as the knot is securely tied. If Enfield or Maria, however, can be made any the happier by that solemn ass professing to perform a divine act, and invoking a blessing on their union, I have no objection—indeed, I am charmed with their simplicity.’

‘I am shocked at the looseness of your religious principles, nephew.’

‘And I,’ he retorted, ‘shall never more be shocked at what the strictly religious principles of a lady I know will allow her to do, and deem it done in the cause of truth and righteousness.’

‘Properly so, too,’ she added firmly, ‘when it is to bring the scion of a noble house to a sense of what is due to his family and his order.’

‘Even though subterfuge and lying are used to rake up the dead past of an innocent man, for the purpose of blighting the life of a trusting young girl.’

‘Say of a possibly innocent man,’ she coolly answered; ‘as to the subterfuge and lying, that is mere supposition on your part—you never even asked to see the correspondence.’

‘Nor was it necessary,’ said he, ‘since my surmise is evidently so near the mark.’

‘I care not; my motive is to save an old name and title from disgrace and extinction. I have said nothing about my love for you, yet I have loved you more than all the members of our race, and would love you still, if you would allow me.’

‘Too late, aunt! I am not one of those who kiss the rod that smites them. Truth to tell, I should hate you for taking any part for or against me in this matter. You should have let me “gang my ain gait.” My own accursed pride is your strongest ally, probably quite strong enough without any bribe of estate or title to prevent me doing the only honour-

able thing to one to whom I owe the deepest gratitude man can owe to woman.'

She would have spoken again, but he abruptly left her.

'If I had but the spirit that would become me, I should bring my Petrel up to that sleek parson and ask him to marry us; but, coward that I am, I dare not! No, I can scoff at the pretensions of the Grantleys, but I cannot be the one to link the name with a stain. Yet I have only barely escaped the same stain myself, ay, and of a deeper dye, through her devotion and heroism. My sentence would have been "hanged by the neck until you are dead," probably commuted to imprisonment for life. How, then, Roland Grantley, are you better than David Cleeve? And it's not David Cleeve you ought to make your wife, but Petrel, who is as spotless of crime or stain as purity itself. Ah, but the case is different, and must be fairly stated with fitting sophistry. I, in the eye of the law, have been guilty of nothing. The charge of shooting blacks, though believed by the whole colony, or the world, carries no disgrace with it. Serving a sentence would entail that, but then I have not nor ever shall serve such a sentence, so no taint attaches.

'David Cleeve picked up a hare, which to a man in his position in the wise Old World is tabooed; to break that taboo is a deadly offence. Listen not to his reasons or explanations; try, sentence, and transport him. He has suffered, undergone imprisonment, and is consequently disgraced, and that disgrace descends—whether deserved or not matters not one straw—to his innocent child. Ay, and to those after her to the third and fourth generation. Well, it is obvious, according to the reasoning of my esteemed relatives, that I, a Grantley of Grantley Hall, free of all stain, cannot, in justice to my order and ancestry, ally myself with so palpable and undeniable a blot, and, moreover, fix it upon any offspring I may have. D——n my pure-bred aunt! why could she not leave me in doubt as to that convict taint? My virtue might have gone so far as not to have inquired myself, and "ignorance would have been bliss" with Petrel!

AUSTRALIAN  
STOCKMAN



PHOTO: H. J. WALTON



Somebody said, "The devil take all old women"; if he had known Miss Grantley he would have added, "and keep them safe too, amen!"

From all which it will be seen that Roland Grantley is considerably perturbed in spirit, and the future of our dear Petrel is wavering in the balance.

## CHAPTER XXX

### THE REVEREND JEREMIAH UTTERS A WORD IN SEASON

FORTUNE was kinder to Maria Grantley, for she was duly married to the man of her choice, the Reverend Jeremiah Jiggs performing the important function in a most impressive manner, not abating one jot of the whole service that can be used on such occasions.

'I hope you don't doubt you are effectually spliced,' whispered Roland to the bride in a purposely audible tone, so that the reverend gentleman could hear, 'for you have had the comprehensive whole from "Dearly beloved" to "amazement"—enough to make any man prefer the broomstick.'

Of course there was the usual feast, the tearful farewell, and final departure, certainly to the relief of the two most concerned. Then they rode away on bush steeds to Enfield's and Gifford's station, 'the Creek,' where in the course of this story we shall be compelled to follow. Meanwhile, we leave them to the fruition of those halcyon dreams which those entering the perfect state of matrimony have a right to expect to be realised.

The Rev. Mr. Jiggs was to have remained for the night or probably longer at Talkie, and Roland, as the host, naturally ought to have desired to stay at home to enjoy his society and to do him honour. That gentleman, however, received intelligence that demanded his presence at an out-station.

'I must start at once,' said this shameless young man, 'and shall not be back till late to-night; pray do not sit up for me'; and straightway he rode off to the Fishery, where

Petrel was waiting, all excitement to hear about the wedding. With her he threw aside the worries of the day, and for a time listened with a lover's delight to her animated inquiries as to how everybody looked, how the bride bore the ceremony and the parting.

Presently the gloom that had possessed him lately came over him, and not all Petrel's flow of spirits could disperse it. He knew she must, when talking of such things, sometimes think of when she too would be a bride—perhaps even wonder that he never spoke on the subject. They had gone to the old seat, and, noticing that he had become silent and abstracted, the girl grew more affectionate. Then his passion broke forth in all its strength beyond his control. He loved her : would she be his without waiting for a parson's blessing ? What availed that ? it could not sanctify their union ; their love did that, not the act of Church or priest or law. Poor Petrel ! loving him as she did, how was she to defend herself against his sophistry, urged with eloquent vehemence ?

At last in an unguarded moment came out an implied doubt that he could marry her.

'Fly with me, darling,' he implored, 'to another colony ; in New South Wales I will take out another run, and we will leave this hateful place where they slander us, and begin a new life.'

'What, and leave dad ?' she cried, shrinking from him appalled. 'You cannot mean it. If I have not deserved better treatment from you, surely he has.'

For very shame he hung his head. 'You would have to leave him if you married me,' he muttered.

She burst into a passion of tears so uncontrollable and violent that it alarmed him, and he vowed he had only been trying her fidelity, and soothed her back to some degree of tranquillity. But when they parted, though with all or more than the old caresses, Petrel felt the first doubts of her lover ; never more shall she know that complete trust in him or any man again. Love him ? Oh yes ! to her last hour she must do that, but not as the perfect hero who won her first affec-



tions. As for him, he mounted his horse and rode furiously away, ashamed, foiled, burning with the passion he felt for her, such as he well knew no other woman could ever inspire. On in a wild tumult he dashed, until the cool sea breeze calmed him down, and he could review more quietly what had passed. He had gone so far now that the next meeting would bring the end. She would certainly want to know why he had so changed, and then he must tell his tale, what his marrying her would cost him and why. Yet he shrank from telling her what her father had been and was still, for he knew it would cut her to the heart. When once she understood the bar between them, she could not blame him so much ; and then the ignoble thought again occurred to him, might she not, after realising all the circumstances, consent to be his without the marriage ceremony ? That she would offer to set him free, rather than ask him to marry her and blight his brightest hopes and prospects, he was sure ; but that was not what he desired. She was the light of his eyes and the joy of his heart—surely she could not leave him ; he would reward her for it by being faithful and true all his life long.

His uncle, if satisfied that he had made no *mésalliance*, would make him his heir, and thus he should obtain the two objects of his great desire—Petrel and the Grantley estate. His wild gallop along the sea beach over, and these satisfactory conclusions arrived at, our hero reached home in a much more prosaic fashion than might have been expected on his leaving the whaling station.

Nor were his dreams of a disquieting nature ; so persuaded was he of ultimate success, that even they partook of the same triumphant tinge. After years of prosperity in Australia, in which Petrel bore a part, he fancied that he went to the old world to take possession of his inheritance and title. Great were the rejoicings of the tenantry at the welcome given the master, Sir Roland, on his arrival from the far-away land ; but, though he could not understand why, Petrel was not with him in these proud moments.

At breakfast the Rev. Jeremiah Jiggs hoped he was not

fatigued after his arduous attention to the duties of his avocation and consequent late ride. To which the young scoffer replied that 'he trusted he had not disturbed Mr. Jiggs at the prayers in which he was doubtless engaged, as he understood was the pious custom of men of the cloth at the midnight hour. As for himself, his burden was almost greater than he could bear, but he hoped to be supported under it.'

On this the parson looked straight down his nose, and Miss Grantley could not forbear a grim smile, while Joan was on the verge of a giggle. As the conversation was in danger of languishing, to set it in flow again Roland asked the reverend gentleman if he believed in ghosts, or if the spirits of the dead returned to the earth?

'In ancient days,' answered the pious man, 'we may fairly assume they did, because we have the authority of Holy Writ to prove it; but as the age of miracles is passed, when the body is once buried I think we may feel very sure we have done with the departed as far as this world is concerned.'

'Your reply,' said Grantley, 'opens up an aspect of the question upon which I wish to be enlightened. Suppose the unfortunate dead has not had the advantage of pious ministrations or those of any one qualified to perform such holy duties, is it not then probable that the spirit may haunt the spot where the murder or violent death had taken place? I have put the case before you, sir, because it is confidently asserted in this neighbourhood that the missing man Salter's ghost can nightly be seen sitting on the white stone on Mount Jagged where his tracks were lost; there was blood on it, but not a trace beyond has ever been found. If you delay your departure until evening you will arrive at the tragic spot about the solemn hour of midnight, and may lay the restless spirit.'

'Thank you,' replied Mr. Jiggs; 'but I cannot defer leaving so long. I have a service to hold this evening at my own church.'

'I regret to hear it,' was the demure reply; 'your horse

shall be brought up immediately after breakfast, since you must go.'

It is needless to say that the object of our hero was to get rid of the parson, inhospitable though it may appear. He distrusted him, and felt that he had been incited to interfere in some way in what the lover knew was a crisis in his life. Already he had been talking with several of the gossips of the village ; probably his next step would be to admonish Petrel or to warn her father.

Such, in fact, was Mr. Jiggs's intention. He was well aware where Roland had been on the previous evening, having had a confidential talk with Miss Grantley during his absence. He had been informed by the lady of her nephew's position and future prospects as regards the Grantley estates, and she even had led him to believe that Roland was bound to his cousin by all the laws of honour. Under these circumstances it was his manifest duty to warn the father of his daughter's peril from the addresses of an immoral young scapegrace.

In inciting the reverend gentleman to move in the matter, Miss Grantley had been actuated by the desire to induce Mr. Cleeve to act ; and she felt that the most effective way was to let him believe that Roland was not only engaged to a lady in England, but that by marrying Petrel he ruined his prospects of inheriting the family estate. She was also sure the parson's zeal would lead him to hint at the immorality of the young man's intentions ; which could not fail to excite the Headman's anger and suspicions. All this she had prepared herself to perform personally if no suitable emissary offered ; but when Mr. Jiggs appeared she was almost ready to welcome him as a divine agent sent in answer to prayer by the direct interposition of Providence. She did not tell him David Cleeve was a convict ; she determined that should not come through her, except as a last resource, as Roland would be sure to divulge it in some way to Petrel ; but she impressed on him that, if Roland Grantley married beneath him, his ruin and that of the old family was certain, as he

might be considered the last of his name. The parson's horse was brought round for him, and, as he rode off after an affectionate farewell to the ladies, Roland seriously warned him to beware as he passed the ghostly stone, for his horse would certainly shy at it, and one tragic event was sufficient for one locality.

'That youth is a scoffer,' said the Rev. Jeremiah to himself, 'and deserves a severe chastisement; possibly it might bring him to see the error of his ways. The day is yet young; I will spend an hour in advising Mr. Cleeve of the sin and danger his child incurs by associating with so wicked a youth. I shall thus be doing my Lord's work, and complying with the wishes of the estimable lady with whom I have just communed.'

It will be seen that Roland's machinations, upon the success of which he was pluming himself, were an utter failure; the early departure gave Miss Grantley's emissary just the time and opportunity to execute the mission intrusted to him. In brief, the saint had proved too clever for the sinner—by no means an exceptional case, even where the subtlety of the serpent and the guile of the unregenerate are both supposed to be on the side of the son of perdition.

The Headman was sitting in his chair on the verandah, both auntie and Petrel being away on some household duties, so that Mr. Jiggs had every opportunity for an uninterrupted interview with the big man. After a few words of greeting he said: 'My time won't admit of delay, so I must at once enter upon the reasons of my calling on you. It is a delicate subject and an unpleasant duty to perform, but my duty as a minister of the Gospel compels me to undertake even unpleasant duties when requested.'

'Speak plainly, sir; there is no need to beat about the bush with a plain man.'

'Then,' replied the parson, 'I am informed that young Mr. Grantley is paying his addresses to your daughter.'

'Well, what then?' said the other quickly.

'Is he a fit husband for her, think you? I fear he is a

wild, immoral youth, and that his intentions are not honourable.'

'By Heaven, parson!' broke out the Headman, 'you need be careful when you talk thus. I have known him ever since he came to me as a boy, and I am aware of nothing he has done to merit the charge you have made.'

'At best he is not a godly youth, such as a father ought to place confidence in, and, moreover, his station in life is different from that of your child; I speak both as a friend and priest, and would warn you to beware of him. Besides, do you know of no cause why he cannot, or ought not, to marry the damsel?'

The still mighty, though wasted, frame of the Headman seemed to collapse at the words, and the pain-stricken face sank into his hands. Presently he raised his head proudly.

'No, sir; before God, I know of no reason why my daughter is not fit to be the wife of the best man that walks God's earth. More than that, I believe no man is half good enough for her.'

'Well, then, I must tell you what I hoped would not be necessary. I am informed that young Grantley is engaged, in honour and duty, to a lady in England, and, if he marries any one beneath him, he forfeits the family estates. Think you he is likely to do that, even though he has cast his eyes on your daughter?'

'If he is the man I have always thought him he will offer to do it, though I would ask no such sacrifice,' was the reply. 'As to being bound to any woman in England, that I do not believe. Miss Grantley may say so—for purposes of her own—but he left as a child, has not been there since, and is not likely to have pledged himself while courting my girl. Whatever you may say, parson, he is not bad enough for that.'

'I will say no more, Mr. Cleeve; it is only a sacred sense of duty that has made me say so much. I should not be worthy of my high office, if I saw a profligate young man trifle with the affections of an innocent girl and did nothing

to save her. Learn for yourself what is said about them in the neighbourhood.'

The Headman reared his tall form to its full height, his good-humoured face aflame with passion.

'I ask the village gossips and tale-bearers aught of my Pet, as if I thought or suspected wrong of her? Parson, I have seen the day when I would have taken thee by the scruff of the neck and seat of thy breeches and put thee on thy horse. I can't do it now, but thee had better get thee gone.'

Then, calming himself—

'Possibly you mean well, but others have made a tool of you, and it's poor wages you will get for doing their dirty work'; and the incensed giant tottered into the cottage leaving the reverend gentleman to ride away, feeling none of that self-satisfied, pious elation with which he had approached.

'A man of Belial still, though like Samson shorn of his strength,' he thought; 'the vials of his wrath will assuredly be poured forth on the young man when next he goes to look with longing eyes upon the maiden.'

Probably this aspect of the matter satisfied the ruffled spirit of the holy man, for he smiled complacently as he urged his steed into a faster pace, and so fades out of our story. He has performed his part, made one happy marriage and done his best to mar another. It does not fall to the lot of every man to do as much in the short space of twenty-four hours.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### BLIGHTED LOVE

THE Headman had barely composed himself, when he received a visit from Abel Turnstile, the young farmer whom we have heard spoken of as an admirer of Petrel. The latter was now a frequent visitor to the whaling station, scarcely saying a word to any one but Mr. Cleeve, and as he was a pleasant

companion, his visits were heartily welcomed by the invalid. So far the father had never thought of him as a possible suitor for his daughter's hand, or that he came in colonial parlance 'to hang up his hat.'

Nor, indeed, had Petrel, or she would have been more reserved in her manner; as it was, she had been perfectly frank and at her ease. Roland never met him there, because when Turnstile was with her father, she, knowing that 'dear old dad' had some one to amuse him, had watched for his coming, and met him outside.

To-day Abel came early, and very soon astonished his friend by asking in a somewhat sheepish way for his consent and help in his wooing. The two aspects of the same question in one day almost bewildered the big man in his weak state of health. He had not yet thought out fully all the bearings of the subject presented in such distasteful colours by Mr. Jiggs, but he instinctively felt there was much reason to fear that the views expressed by the unwelcome emissary were in the main correct. If so, here was a worthy young fellow who had no relatives to oppose, or make themselves unpleasant; or if he had, they would be delighted to receive such a dear girl. Then again, Petrel would not be taken from him perhaps to the uttermost ends of the earth, as Grantley was not at all unlikely to do; in which case he might never see her more. 'Ah, well,' he thought, his gentle, tender heart sinking all the while, 'even that too if she wishes it. It won't be for long. My little girl must please herself.'

'Abel,' he said, 'Petrel must act for herself. I will let her marry any one she wishes, and when she wishes; but if you take my advice you will say nothing to her yet; wait awhile and see what turns up. It may be that she will think more kindly of you when you become better acquainted with each other.'

So it was settled. The lover was not so ardent but that he could 'bide his time.' He knew that Petrel loved Roland too well for him to have the slightest chance of winning her, unless some strong influence were brought to bear on her. It

might be by the father, or Grantley's family, each member of which was bitterly opposed to the connection, as he in common with the whole community knew.

'I can wait,' thought Abel Turnstile, 'and the proud young master may find that the waiting horse wins. If I do, I'll take fine care that the same district does not hold him and us. I'm too fly for that. He's a regular devil with the girls; and they all appear to like him for it, too, which is more than the men do.'

As for the Headman, he now felt more inclined than ever to let things drift without attempting to control them; yet Petrel should be told that if Roland married her, it must be at a great sacrifice to him. Both ought also to know his own miserable history. That had been brought home to him now that he knew his daughter's lover was heir to a great estate and ancient name. When Roland was a mere struggling young colonial, it seemed to him nothing but reasonable that a good and beautiful girl like Petrel should marry him without any embarrassing questions being asked about her father's antecedents. There had been many such marriages in the colonies and would be many more, in cases where old convicts (how he winced at the word) had prospered and made a position for themselves.

But with such a stake at issue it was different. No man ought to forfeit his expectations without his eyes being opened. Supposing the parson had told him the truth, this was what Roland would ignorantly do, if he married Petrel, believing her to be the child of a man of unstained reputation. As he was now in fairly independent circumstances, possibly he would fling all these considerations aside, and take her to be his wife in defiance of them all.

At any rate there is no other course for me; Roland must be told the whole truth. Petrel, too, will never forgive me if there is any concealment, and Grantley were to marry her under a misconception. I shall tell her the whole history, and then she shall be the judge as to what ought to be done. That she would set her lover free he felt very certain; but



would he accept that freedom, forgetting that he owed both life and honour to her devotion ?

In his own great, generous heart, the Headman thought this must be impossible. The boy he had cared for and loved as much as if he had been his own son, would maintain that no sacrifice was too great to make for such a prize to take to his heart and home.

Is it not always so in actual life ? We judge others by our own standard, which may be too high or too low for their deserts.

‘Pet, dear,’ said the Headman, ‘I want to have a long talk with you ; come and sit down beside me. Parson Jiggs has been here speaking about you and Roland, and the upshot of it all is, that you must be told who your father is, and how I came out to Australia. Come close, dear, and I will tell you the whole story as quickly as I can, and have done with it.

‘You know that I am the son of a tenant-farmer in Staffordshire, and that there were two of us, my brother John and myself. Father and mother both died when we were biggish boys. Being steady fellows we carried on the farm, and were doing very well. The family of the Cleeves had always borne the highest character, and the landlord had always received his rent to the day for years past, and was quite satisfied with the way we cultivated his land. I was nearly twenty-one when I first met your mother, Ruth Barnton, the prettiest girl in the village. She was courted by a gamekeeper named Esau Box, but though he was very determined, she threw him over and accepted me. For this he swore to be revenged, and an opportunity soon offered of gratifying his spite. Poaching had been very prevalent, and it was decided to put it down by making an example of the first man caught. One evening I was walking along a lane near the village, which divided two large estates, when I came upon a wounded hare being worried by a dog. It was nearly dead, and to save it from the brute I picked it up and carried it with me, intending to leave it at a keeper’s cottage a little farther on. I had not got far when Esau Box and

two policemen pounced upon me from behind a hedge and charged me with poaching. At first it was no use telling them how I had found the hare, and that I was going to deliver it at the keeper's cottage. They laughed and said, "Tell that to the horse marines," but after a while I believe they would have let me go but for Esau. One of the policemen had seen the dog chase something, and heard it barking, and there were teeth-marks on the dead animal. Then Box put his hand on me and swore that, if they would not take me he would, and lag me too. I could not stand that, and knocked him down senseless. For a while we thought he was dead, and a cart had to be got to carry him home.

'Of course they stuck to me now, and I was locked up. The trial came on, and I was sentenced to transportation for life. That, dear, is how your father became a convict.' The last words were uttered in a whisper.

'My poor, dear dad!' and her arms took his bowed head, and clasped it to her, as she wept and sobbed over him.

'In Van Diemen's Land, I was after a time assigned to a Mr. Grote, who was very good and kind, and when a ticket-of-leave was granted, he helped me to start fishing, and I soon made a little money. Brother John had married, and now came out bringing his wife and your mother, God bless him for it! She and I were made man and wife, and all went well for two years. We then bought a schooner and combined trading with fishing. On one of these trips you were born, in a terrible storm, which is the reason we called you Petrel. Several lives were lost, and it was a mercy the vessel did not go down. Your poor mother never recovered the effects of the exposure at such a time, and died a few weeks later, leaving me wishing I could die too.

'Then I went whaling, and after some years came here as headman. John had died shortly before, so auntie came with me to look after you. That is all, Pet. Can you love your old father as much as ever?'

'More, dear old dad,' and the girl smiled in his worn face, though her eyes were filled with tears; 'I love you more

than ever for all your goodness and all your wrongs. Oh, what must you have suffered, and so unjustly, too ! ’

There was a pause.

‘ What became of Esau Box ? ’

‘ He was made alderman of the village when it grew into a town, and died in his bed twelve months ago honoured by all,’ was the answer through his set teeth.

‘ Oh, dad, and was he never punished ? ’

‘ Never ; I could have died happy years since if I could have had five minutes with him and none to part us.’

The girl looked at him with her head erect and her blue eyes flashing with pride and admiration. It was thus that women in the old days encouraged heroes, when the old law ‘ An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth ’ still prevailed.

‘ Must Roland be told ? ’ she presently asked with a blanched, inquiring face, like one who had not yet realised what it all meant. ‘ For your sake I will give even him up, and then this horrid secret need never be known,’ and she burst into a passion of tears,

‘ No, Pet, he must be told, though I expect that his aunt has taken care that he has already been informed, and then you and he must decide for yourselves what is to be done.’

Then he acquainted her with Abel Turnstile’s suit as a thing that she ought to know ; but seeing the pained look in the face he idolised, he added, ‘ Don’t let it trouble you, Pet ; if you like, I will tell him there is no hope for him.’

‘ Tell him never to say a word about it to me,’ she cried with such distress that the indulgent father promised anything to soothe her.

Unfortunate Petrel ! With a heavy heart she met her lover that night at the trysting-place. There was a restraint upon him too, for he had determined to tell her all, and learn if there was any denial of his aunt’s charge, that David Cleeve was a convict. But as he looked in her face, pale and more lovely than ever in the moonlight, and felt her arms clinging to him, his heart failed. So in silence they stayed for a while, and then she spoke—

‘Roland, Mr. Jiggs came to father to-day and told him something about you. Something that I ought to know, for he says it may part us,’ and she clung the closer, her head resting on his breast.

Bending over her he whispered, ‘The parting, darling, will depend on you,’ and then he told her all—the conditions on which the great estate would be his, and that, but for the indelible stain upon her father’s name, he would marry her, and trust to her beauty and goodness to plead their cause with his uncle.

At these words, she drew herself from his arms and stood alone, silent and motionless, with a look of dismay and reproach in her eyes which was bound to haunt him to his latest hour.

‘Is the tale about your father true?’ he asked, putting out his arm to clasp her again, but she recoiled from him.

‘That he suffered wrongfully?—yes.’

‘Ah, Petrel, but the odium attaches all the same,’ he said sorrowfully. ‘I am sure he was not guilty, but we can never prove it after all these long years, and if we could, my uncle would never forget or forgive what has been; he is so proud of his old family and name.’

She sank weeping on the stone seat as if unconscious of his presence, but, when he touched her, she looked up.

‘You here still? why are you not gone?’

‘I cannot leave you,’ he said; ‘I love you. O Petrel, forgive me if my pride cannot forget what your father has been. I could never endure the taunts and gibes I should meet. I cannot throw off all the teaching and training of my childhood, like an old garment. I am not noble enough to sacrifice so much. But will you not be mine without that hateful tie, which those who love each other as we do need not to bind them together for ever?’

He had taken her again in his arms and passionately pleaded in eloquent burning words, while she clung to him like one taking a long and last farewell. Still he urged her, his soul on fire at the sight of her beauty, and believing her

silence implied consent. How it was he knew not, but she slipped from his encircling embrace, and he was alone. He could yet feel her kiss upon his lips, how then could he guess that it was the last caress save one he would ever receive from the woman who loved him more than all the world? To-morrow night he would surely see her come again to whisper that she loved him too deeply to let him go; yet he lingered at the spot where she had been but a moment ago, almost believing that she would even then return. How lovely she was, worth all the wealth and rank of the old world! If she came back now, he would sue for forgiveness and abandon all for her sweet sake. Should he follow her to the cottage and boldly, bravely, like an honourable gentleman, claim her as his bride? The generous impulse was on him; why did his pride prevail and turn aside his advancing steps? No, let her come to him and he would be satisfied and lay all at her feet; and so Roland Grantley flung his happiness away.

It was a night of mourning. All through the long hours Petrel sighed and wept over her ruined hopes and blighted love, not for herself only but for him, once her idol, her king among men, whom she had thought endowed with such noble attributes. How had he fallen—down—down to the common level of ordinary mortals, and yet her heart pleaded for him. If he came again, could she resist? No, she must end it as her father desired.

The Headman was early astir, and with wistful eyes was gazing over the sea that he would never more traverse, when his daughter joined him, her pale face sad, but composed, as that of one who has watched and prayed all night over the beloved dead, whom she shall see no more.

‘Dad,’ she said, ‘I will marry Abel Turnstile at once, but he must take me away for a time.’

‘My poor Pet,’ replied the father as he kissed her, ‘God bless you!’

Nothing more was said, but each felt that the other knew that all was over between Roland Grantley and Petrel Cleeve.

## CHAPTER XXXII

## ROLAND LOVES AND RIDES AWAY

ROLAND GRANTLEY lay abed, rather later than usual, with his window open to admit the morning air coming in fresh and pure from the sea. He had been out late, waiting at the trysting-place for Petrel, in the vain hope that she would meet him. Refusing to believe that she could give him up, and therefore ready to assign her absence to any other cause, he had been devoured with impatience and a tumult of conflicting feelings, and, when compelled to leave the spot by the utter hopelessness of her appearing, he was in a fit condition for any desperate deed. All had long gone to rest when he reached home, but that was no unusual thing of late, and without disturbing any one, he went to his room and tossed to and fro, unable to satisfy himself why Petrel had not come to meet him. Even if the Headman were ill, she surely might have come for a moment to say so. Could she be ill herself? No, he had seen her shadow on the window-blind. There was some other cause which he must fathom.

Daylight broke with this purpose still occupying his mind. Yes, he would find it all out to-day, even if he went to the house and confronted the Headman, which, since he had determined to induce Petrel to elope, he had shrunk from doing. He feared a scene, and, from the coldness of his reception on his last visit, it was evident that both the old people distrusted him. No matter; get to the bottom of the mystery he must, if he bearded all the guardians ever appointed by the Providence that watches over maiden innocence. He would circumvent them yet; Petrel should be his, by fair means or foul. She could not resist him, provided he only had the opportunity to press his suit. She loved him far too well for that. Ah! a sudden light broke upon him—that was it—knowing, fearing his influence and power over her, she was keeping away from him, and the



Middleton Rocks  
&  
Murray Beach



Middleton Rocks  
&  
Breakers:





others were helping her. By Heaven, he would see her, in spite of herself, and win her too.

‘Joan,’ his aunt’s voice came in loud tones through the open window, and instinctively he felt it was for a purpose (in fact Miss Grantley never acted without a motive)—‘have you heard the latest item of local intelligence that is popularly supposed to interest us poor women-creatures most? Petrel Cleeve is to be married to-morrow.’

‘To whom?’ came the reply, in a suppressed tone, for Joan at once thought of her brother.

‘No other than Abel Turnstile, who has been courting her lately. I told you how it would be, my dear.’

With an imprecation that would have lifted Miss Grantley’s false hair off had she heard it, Roland sprang up. The problem was solved without any trouble on his part. Some kind of intuitive perception told him, incredible as it might appear, that the report was true. Was he to be baffled thus, and that thick-headed clod to snatch the prize he had always looked upon as his own?

‘By God, if so, it shall be soiled,’ he swore. ‘Can she, loving one man, as she undeniably does, marry another? Why, damnation, it is worse than prostitution; the vilest trafficker of her person in the streets might well gibe at it; to the deepest hell with pure women if they can do such things and justify them.’

Should he snatch her from them now, by marrying her? That, at least, was in his power. No; he would take a deep revenge; he would bear her away when she was a wife—not at the church door quite, but a little later. He would only require a few moments with her alone, and that could be arranged by some subterfuge put in practice to get the new-fledged bridegroom out of the way.

The man was indomitable in his purpose, and there was a strong ally striving constantly for him in the heart of the girl, who shrank from the course she was committed to, scarcely daring to hope that at the last moment there might be some means of escape.

'I will see her to-night, and win her from them yet,' he muttered to himself. But night came and went without his being able to meet her. Then his pride came to his aid.

'She could come to me if she wished,' he thought. 'She must have heard my signals, and, however watched, might have seized some opportunity. If our positions could be reversed, I would have gone to her through fire and water. It is all over now; she will be married to-day. So be it. My beloved aunt has won, and will probably attribute it all to a further manifestation of the divine interposition of Providence in shaping events to suit the projects of the scheming members of the house of Grantley. Say, rather, that it is an exemplification of the devilry that can be wrought by an intriguing, unscrupulous old woman in prosecution of her own selfish interests. But, aunt of mine, if I ever become the lord of Grantley Hall, there shall be no warm nook, no share in the splendour of the position for you, nor safe provision for your old age either. I dare swear, though, you have already made that secure with Sir Archibald beyond my power to alter.'

That evening he could not keep away from the old trysting-place. He went to see if Petrel had left any sign by which he would know that she had been there, or would come.

There was nothing, but, by the lights and moving forms in the cottage, it was evident that the marriage-festivities were going on.

With a deep curse he turned to leave, when a girlish figure appeared in the darkness—not Petrel, he knew that at a glance. There was no other who possessed her light, graceful, fairy-like form, or the gliding, noiseless step, with which he had seen her so often hasten to meet him.

'What is it?' he asked; 'you have some message!'

It was the ring returned to him that he had given her long ago. He took it, to toss it into the sea, but checked himself. It was a memento of her that he might value yet.

'Go,' he said to the girl, 'and bring her here, if but for a

moment. Tell her I *will* see her to-night—she may choose how!’

Would she come? Yes! There was no mistaking the one woman he would ever love with the burning passion that is now consuming him. He is at her side, gazing with flashing eyes into her tearless, hopeless face. Ah! how changed since last they met!

‘How has all this come about?’ he fiercely asked.

‘Oh, I know not,’ she answered wearily, ‘don’t ask me.’

‘Why did you leave me? How could you have the heart to do it?’

‘I hoped to the last that you would claim me, even at the church door,’ she said, in the same weary tone.

‘Come now! now!’ he cried vehemently.

‘Too late! Too late! I am a wife! Farewell!’

He snatched her to him. ‘My darling, come! Come; I love you!’

There was a noise of opening doors at the cottage, and loud voices were heard.

‘They are coming,’ she said. ‘Let me go!’

‘I care not! I will not let you go! You are mine!’

‘Too late!’ she replied despairingly. ‘For my sake, let me go!’

His arms fell from her, and he stood alone; ah! never before so much alone, not even when on the Ninety Mile Beach, a desolate boy, he fled for his life. Henceforth a solitary man, to fight life’s battles carrying with him a load of vain regrets and remorse.

No, not yet! The indomitable spirit of the man sternly refused to acknowledge defeat. He would go to Abel Turnstile’s house and wait there concealed; there might still be a chance of seeing her alone and bearing her away. He thought not, recked not of the consequences to her. If she would go he would take her. The Star and his other best horse were ready, and they could be miles away before pursuit was organised.

Furious with anger and impatience, he waited long hours.

'I will give her every opportunity,' he thought, as hour succeeded hour; but they came not. At last he mounted his horse and returned to the Fishery. All was in darkness. It was evident the guests had dispersed; but what of the wedded pair? He ground his teeth as he realised that once more he had been outwitted.

'Perhaps it is as well so,' he muttered grimly, 'for if we two met now, Abel Turnstile, if there is any manhood in you, there would be murder done. Come up, old Star; you have borne a part in a crisis of my life before now; but never such a devil's dish as this. Oh for the old days when a man might follow and fight to right or revenge his own wrong.'

In the morning he learned that, almost directly after he had seen her, Petrel was taken by her husband to a friend's house some miles on the road to Adelaide, and that they were on their way to another colony.

'Why could you not have told me this last night?' he asked the girl, the same who had served as Petrel's messenger. 'I would have been for ever grateful.'

'It was all arranged before, but I did not know it until they found out you had seen her, and you were gone then. Besides, they scolded me so and never let me out of their sight,' and she began to cry. 'Indeed, sir, I would have done more if I could.'

'Thank you,' and he shook her hand, 'don't cry; it is better as it is—you know "marriages are made in heaven"—or—hell.'

Stern and self-possessed, he occupied the next day in business connected with his property, and then took his departure for the Tatiara, never by word or look having indicated to Miss Grantley that he was aware of the part taken by her, through Mr. Jiggs, in shaping the events of the last few days.

As he rode off—

'There goes the future baronet, Sir Roland Grantley of Grantley Hall,' she exclaimed complacently to Joan. 'It is to be hoped that when he takes possession of his honours

and estates he will be actuated by kinder feelings towards her to whom he owes them. Still, I don't love him the less ; he is a masterful young fellow, capable of feeling a great passion, and of doing great things. He will never forget his lost love ; but that does not matter if he marries Sir Archibald's daughter and leaves heirs to the family estate.'

'Poor Rolly, I am dreadfully sorry for him, going away so wretched,' said Joan.

'Pooh ! pooh ! my dear. His going means Floss Gifford coming—the discarded lover gone—the ardent wooer present. It must be acknowledged that our sex plays strange pranks with the lords of creation. I have often wished to be a man, but since yesterday I think I am glad I am a woman.'

From which it may be inferred that Miss Grantley congratulated herself on the triumphant consummation of her resolution to prevent what she called her nephew making a fool of himself by marrying that 'pretty young person.'

'If I had only succeeded in parting the silly things,' she subsequently explained to Joan, 'it would not have been half so satisfactory, because I should have always feared something bringing them together again. Men are such foolish creatures where a pretty face is concerned, and I must allow that girl is remarkably good-looking ; but she is married now, my dear, and in this case really done for. Thank goodness, the episode is finally closed, and I may look upon it as though it had never been. It was a danger—an imminent pressing danger—to the Grantley house and line. I should not wonder now if I succeed in inducing Roland to return home to press his suit with his cousin, just to show "the pretty young person" that he is not inconsolable. That is just what one of our sex would do. Of course, men are different, and not infrequently wear the willow until quite old age. I can only hope my nephew will recognise his duty to the family, even if he is not to be swayed by the considerations that would actuate us women.'

Joan in her heart did not at all agree with these, as she thought, disparaging observations respecting the constancy

of her sex to even a lost idol. She thought if Floss could marry some one else she would never, never love another, and without doing that, could she bring herself to become a wife? Obviously not, and the girl who could do so was a 'nasty thing.' Now Joan had never thought Petrel a 'nasty thing'; indeed, though her aunt had taken care that the two girls saw little of each other, yet they occasionally had met, and the young English lady thought the Headman's daughter the loveliest girl she had ever seen, and one of the best into the bargain.

At one time she had been ready to help her brother to win her for his bride and to take her to her heart as a sister, but Roland had nipped her approaches in the bud. He would not discuss his love affair with any one, much less with one of his own family. What could poor Joan do then but let things take their course? But when Petrel flung over her brother and married that commonplace farmer in preference, she could not understand it. That such an innately refined girl should take the poor farmer and reject the born gentleman, the man she loved, as every one believed, was passing strange, and Joan had to give it up as inscrutable.

Then there were pleasanter things to think about; the arrival of that paragon of men, Mr. Floss Gifford, for example, to look forward to. She could not discuss this with her aunt; in spite of the lead-over that usually austere lady had given her on Roland's departure, things were not advanced enough between them for her to be taken into confidence yet; but when she met Maria and James Enfield there was much pleasing badinage. She pretended, of course, in the proper maidenly manner, that it annoyed her, but she could not prevent a tell-tale colour coming into her face. On several occasions she found imperative reasons why she should visit the Creek to see dear Maria, and when there was very particular to ask if anything had been heard of Roland.

When three weeks had elapsed another visit became absolutely necessary. She had that day received a brief note from her brother, saying that he had safely arrived at

the Tatiara, so her anxiety could not be on his account. As she rode up Enfield met her at the gate to take her horse.

‘Such a bother,’ said he. ‘Gifford has found it absolutely necessary to leave the station, and is not expected back for several weeks, perhaps months.’

‘Then he won’t be able to visit you for a long time,’ replied Joan, with a brave attempt to prevent her face from flaming.

‘Who said he wouldn’t,’ answered he, with affected surprise. ‘Why, that is just the reason he was so anxious to start, almost before Ronald had time to take off his boots. Never was a fellow in such a hurry. I believe there’s a girl in the case; perhaps half-a-dozen,’ he added mischievously.

But Joan was gone, quite in a flurry, to inform Maria that her husband was a wretch. After hearing how she had been caught, her sister consoled her with the intelligence that Mr. Gifford might be expected in two days.

‘I will ride over to see aunt when he arrives,’ she said, ‘and arrange for you paying the promised visit to us. I dare say he will offer to escort me, as Jem already complains that honeymooning has thrown his work behind, and will be glad to relegate that duty to him. They soon tire of us, my dear, and fly off to the all-absorbing sheep and cattle.’

The young lady did not reply to a conclusion so uncomplimentary to the male sex, but she no doubt felt quite confident that her future husband would never neglect her society for the four-footed animals that have sprung from Noah’s stud.

Shortly after this she departed for home with the pleasing reflection that another three or four days would bring her king of men to woo her. Of that she felt very sure, though never a word of love had passed between them. Then she made up her mind to be very reserved, and not to show him a bit the state of her feelings, of which she was so conscious. He must not think she was too easily won. Absorbed in these and other pleasant reflections, she was quite surprised to find her horse rubbing his nose against the Talkie gates, almost before she had well started, as she thought.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

## A BUSH MYSTERY

THE next three days did not appear the shortest in Miss Joan Grantley's experience, but they were at length drawing to a close when two figures were seen approaching at a rapid pace. One was Mrs. Enfield, of that there could be no doubt ; and there was even less, if that were possible, that the other was Floss Gifford, or why did her heart beat so ? Of course she was delighted to see her sister, but, considering they had met little more than two days since, surely her arrival could not account for the warm, even effusive welcome and that tell-tale rush of colour to her cheek. At any rate, Sister Maria was soon handed over to Aunt Arabella's care, and Mr. Gifford had to answer a variety of questions respecting Roland.

Then the plants had to be examined in the garden, though it is problematical whether Floss saw them, as he seemed to be paying more attention to his companion's pretty flushed face—in which he showed very good taste, for where in all Nature's vast variety of floral beauty is there one specimen to compare with fair maidenhood in the unconscious glory of her first love ?

'Now, Mr. Gifford, unless my husband is to become utterly distracted, under the impression that you have run away with me, or that some serious calamity has happened, we really must go. Aunt says, Joan, that you can come to stay with us for a week or a fortnight. I daresay Jem, or some one, will ride over and fetch you in a few days.'

Floss looked as if he thought a more private farewell would have been the proper thing, but the inexorable young matron bore him off without any opportunity for this being afforded.

'A nice gentlemanly young man,' observed Miss Grantley ; 'he comes of a good family. With the exception of Roland, I don't know any one with a more aristocratic manner.'

Which were high words of commendation from her, and



rightly understood by the young lady to mean that she was quite ready to receive him as a nephew.

The following day, Enfield appeared about some business connected with the Talkie property, and the indefatigable suitor accompanied him. On this occasion he devoted himself to the lady of the house in a most exemplary manner, probably incited thereto by the discreet Maria—a young woman wise in her day and generation in all pertaining to the art of wheedling guardians. Miss Grantley was more pre-possessed than ever.

Mr. Gifford was now pronounced to be a gentleman of exceptionally good manner and address, 'as she had always declared.'

'Nothing to fear in that quarter, Floss,' said Enfield, as they rode home, alluding to their late hostess. 'Now for a spin along the beach, or we shall be late for dinner; and, though you mayn't think it now, wives, when they get us alone, can flare up if we are not in punctually to meals.'

Gifford knew this must be a playful libel, if, indeed, his friend meant anything at all by it. Where yet was there a bachelor deeply in love, and with the first mazy threads which precede matrimony around him, who ever believed that his idol would cease to smile upon him?

The following morning he rode down to Talkie and brought back the fair Joan in the evening, and after that the two were of no manner of use to anybody. They merely walked or rode to all the pretty places in the neighbourhood, as the way of lovers is, and were quite content. One afternoon a messenger came from Talkie to say that wild dogs had rushed a flock of sheep out of the yard during the previous night, and would Mr. Enfield come and attend to the matter at once?

'I cannot go,' said that gentleman; 'there is a lot of drafting to be done here. Two flocks have got boxed by the confounded carelessness of the fools of shepherds.'

'I'll ride over to-night,' said Floss, 'so as to be ready in the morning to hunt up the lost jumbucks. I told Roland I would help you to look after the place.'

So it was settled, and a horse was kept in the stable for his use immediately after the usual evening stroll with Joan. That night the four happy young people sat late over their dinner ; then the men talked in the verandah, while smoking their pipes, about the next day's proceedings.

'I don't suppose I shall have much trouble about that flock,' said Floss ; 'you say the shepherd is a good man.'

'So he is, and very likely he has got them all together again ; but if not, you may have a job—the dingoes are worse than I ever knew them.'

'Well, good-night, old fellow ; I shall not come in again.' Then he passed through the house, with a cheery farewell to Maria.

Joan was in her room—had, indeed, been reading her prayer-book (was it the marriage service ?)—and, on hearing her lover's voice, mechanically put it in her pocket. As she was passing out after him, her sister said—

'As I am tired, Joan, we shall soon be going to bed, so I'll say good-night now,' and the sisters kissed for the last time.

Joan followed her lover out through the garden gate a few yards away. Maria watched them with a pleased, smiling glance.

'He will propose to-night,' she thought, 'and to-morrow Jo will have such a tale to tell me about the dear fellow, and how happy she is.'

'Now, Maria, come to bed,' called her husband ; 'I've got to be up at daylight to draft the sheep these confounded dunderheads boxed to-day.'

'They will be engaged to-night,' she answered as she closed the door, 'and I hope he will make her as happy as you have made me.'

'If you don't make haste and get into bed,' a smothered voice from under the blankets replied, 'it will be easy to do that.'

'There she comes in,' replied the wife, ignoring the

implied threat, and hearing a door open and shut ; ' I have a good mind to go out and ask her all about it.'

' If you do, I'll lock you out for the night ; do you suppose I can live without any sleep ? '

At the mere mention of such a direful threat as even a temporary suspension of conjugal rights, the young matron crept meekly in beside her lord, and there we leave her.

During the night there was a heavy fall of rain, and the morning broke dark and cloudy.

' Pleasant sort of occupation handling wet sheep, a morning like this,' grumbled Enfield, as he looked ruefully out of the window in the direction of the drafting yards, where his operations were to be carried on, and which were situated above three hundred paces away from the house. ' However, here come the flocks, so I must make haste and get ready.'

Presently he appeared equipped for work.

' Hulloo ! ' he shouted to a shepherd just coming out of the kitchen, a building inside the enclosing fence but a little detached from the house, ' are you going to put the sheep in the garden instead of in the yards ? '

The man shouted to his dog, ' Baldy,' and in a moment the flock swung round the fence with a rush, almost forcing in the front gate, and then away in a dense mass out towards the scrub, whence they had to be brought back.

' Lucky the brutes did not smash all before them and trample down the few flowers we are possessed of,' said Enfield, ' or both Maria and Jo would be in a pretty wax. As it is, they have made the whole place a puddle.'

After this, the jumbucks were on their best behaviour, and ran through the race as if each individual were already tired of the neighbour he or she had been so eager to join the day previous, and meant to be rid of him or her with the utmost despatch. Then they were counted out and pronounced ' all right ! '

' There you are, men,' exclaimed the owner, as one flock was nearly out of sight in one direction, while the other moved

off past the house in another. 'I hope you won't get in the same mess in a hurry. It's drawing too near shearing to have much of this dirty yard-work, if fleeces are to be fairly clean.'

With which observation he bethought himself of breakfast and turned towards the house.

'Grilled mutton-chops for three, with buttered toast and flaming hot coffee. I'm ready, if they are. Why, what's the matter with the wife?'

He might well ask, for, with terror in her face, she met him, crying distractedly—

'Oh, Jem, I can't find Jo anywhere, and she has not slept in bed. What can have happened to her?'

A hurried visit to Joan's room at once convinced Enfield that she had not slept there, or been in it since she went out the evening before with her lover. The servant had neither heard her go out nor return—indeed, had not seen her since clearing away the dinner-things and carrying them to the kitchen. But some considerable time afterwards, as she stood in the doorway, she had heard Mr. Gifford's horse as he rode rapidly away.

'The first thing,' said Enfield, 'is to see Floss; he appears to be the last person who has seen her. I will start for Talkie at once.'

'Oh, Jem, you don't think she can have gone off with him?' whispered Maria.

'I don't want to say or think anything, my dear; I only go to him now because he was, so far as we know, the last to see her. While I get my horse, look carefully if she has left a letter, or if any clothing has gone more than she wore when she went out.'

While preparing for this ride, his wife once more searched every place where a note was likely to be found, but with no result. The clothes, too, of the missing girl were all in their places, except those she had on when she kissed her sister and said good-night.

'She never went away of her own will, whatever has

happened,' cried Maria, 'or she would not have bidden me good-night as she did.'

'And we heard her come in,' he answered; 'you did not hear her go out again, did you?'

'No, but I soon went off to sleep, and did not wake till morning when you got up.'

'Yes, and I was just as great a sleepy-head,' he replied. 'Perhaps she has gone out for a walk, and will return presently laughing at us for making a fuss about nothing.'

'But she never went to bed, dear!'

'I had forgotten that,' he answered sorrowfully. 'Well it's no use conjecturing all sorts of things; I will be off, and shall hope to find her here when I get back, very sorry for having given us such a fright.'

'Oh, Jem, that is a vain hope; I am sure something dreadful has occurred,' sobbed poor Maria.

'Don't jump at conclusions; we shall find her all right, I have no doubt.' Then he was gone at a pace that would soon bring him to Talkie.

As he dashed on, a dark foreboding crossed his mind that an awful mystery was being enacted. What if his friend, urged on by an uncontrollable, overmastering passion, as men have been, had committed a crime, and then, to cover that, in his frenzy, had added murder. Such deeds are recorded of many, considered by those who knew them best as utterly incapable of evil. If so, he would exact a deep revenge.

Then came a revulsion of feeling, a loyalty to the man he had known and trusted so long. No, he could depend upon the honour of Floss Gifford, though all the world condemned him. He would soon know; he would ride straight up to Talkie and walk into the house as if he expected to meet Joan in quite the ordinary way.

But these plans were upset by meeting the man he sought at the gate of the paddock, and the first glance at the happy face dispelled the last trace of doubt and suspicion.

'Hulloa, Jem! have you ridden over to congratulate me?'

Joan said she would tell Maria the first thing in the morning, if no opportunity offered last night.'

'Then Joan is not here?' said the other.

'Here!' almost shouted Gifford. 'How can she be here when she is at the Creek? What are you dreaming about?'

'Floss,' said his friend, 'we cannot find Joan. She did not sleep in her bed last night, and no one has seen her since she went out with you.'

The other gazed at him with wild eyes and a dazed expression.

'I don't understand,' he muttered. 'Where else could she sleep? I left her at the gate.'

'Thank God for that!' murmured Enfield. 'And you have never seen her since?'

'Never. How could I? I rode straight on here.'

'Well, Floss, we must go back and find her. Perhaps it will be best not to tell Miss Grantley yet; but I must call at the police station and inform them.'

The sergeant, when told of the circumstances, looked grave.

'I will follow you immediately,' he said, 'with two black trackers. There are a number of the natives camped at the Nob. I'll tell them as I pass to come after me and search.'

Impatient to be off and doing, the two friends scarcely listened to these details before leaving him.

'I can't make it out,' said Floss. 'I asked her if she loved me almost directly we left the garden, and she seemed so happy—and she was, too,' he added defiantly, as if the other were contradicting him. 'You must be mistaken; we shall find her laughing at us for being so silly when we arrive. Maybe she will be annoyed at the police being told, because the news will fly all over the district.'

'I trust you are right,' answered Enfield, as they reached his house. A look in his wife's face was enough; he knew she had no good tidings. Floss grasped her hand.

'I asked her to be my wife,' he said brokenly, 'and she seemed so glad, and promised she would as soon as I liked, and things could be arranged.'

## CHAPTER XXXIV

## A FRUITLESS SEARCH

POLICE-SERGEANT WASH, attended by a trooper and two black trackers, rode up almost before our friends had completed their inquiries. He was a man with a high reputation in the force, alert in manner, and never known to suffer an offender to escape by placing too much confidence in him.

‘Mr. Enfield,’ said he, ‘has nothing been heard of the young lady?’

‘Nothing!’ was the reply.

‘Then I will first make inquiries of all who were last in her company. Please tell me what you know.’

As the reader is acquainted with all that James Enfield and his wife could tell him, we need not follow their examination. Then came the servant, Susan Polby.

She had never seen Miss Joan after clearing away the dinner-things, nor Mr. Gifford either; but she heard him ride away along the hard road as she went into the house by the front door, just before going to bed about half-past nine. She generally entered the house by the back, but, when she was outside listening to the loud sound of the galloping horse, she noticed that the gate was only partially closed, and went to shut it. Then she saw the front door was open, and so entered that way, closing it after her. She passed through the house by the pantry adjoining Miss Grantley’s room, as she wanted some matches to light her bedroom candle. Yes, she passed Miss Joan’s door, but it was shut, and she thought she had gone to bed. She was sure of the time, as she had looked at the kitchen clock when going outside.

‘It appears, then, Mr. Enfield, that the person you heard enter the house was the witness, and not your sister-in-law.’

‘I fear so,’ he replied; ‘I only heard indistinctly, as I was in bed and half asleep, but some one certainly came in at about half-past nine.’

Mrs. Enfield confirmed this statement when appealed to;

she had only concluded it was her sister because she did not expect any one else to enter by the front door.

‘ Now, Mr. Gifford, will you tell us all you know ? ’

‘ I will do my best,’ he replied, ‘ to give you all the information in my power, and as briefly as possible, for I am eager to begin searching for her. Miss Grantley did not go out for a walk with me as stated ; we have been in the habit of doing so lately, but last night it was not so early as usual, as I was delayed arranging with Mr. Enfield about going to Talkie. We were out for about an hour, and during that time Miss Grantley became engaged to me. I accompanied her back to the gate, and there we parted ’—poor Floss’s voice shook here—‘ and I hastened to my horse, which was ready saddled in the stable, as I wished to reach Talkie before they retired to rest. As Susan says, I did ride hard for the reason mentioned.’

‘ Where did you walk with Miss Grantley ? ’

‘ Only to a big log, a seat we had often gone to up the creek.’

‘ Nowhere else ? ’

‘ No, straight there and straight back, after sitting down for a while.’

‘ Are there any water-holes deep enough to drown people in the creek ? ’

‘ Not at this time of year,’ said Gifford.

‘ Now, gentlemen,’ said the sergeant, ‘ we will go over the ground.’

The Creek station was situated on a small stream taking its rise in the dense scrub which covers most of the centre of the peninsula between St. Vincent’s Gulf and Encounter Bay. It then winds through the hills, increasing in volume, until it reaches the level country at the foot of the range, and finally mingles its waters with those of the mighty river, an ambitious destiny for so small a brook. In winter, when the heavy rains fall, it for a few short hours might aspire to be considered a torrent of some pretensions ; but in its usual state it was a shallow creek with no large water-holes from





CHIPPEN  
CREEK



THE  
GAP



one end to the other. It was prettily wooded along its banks and on the flats with she-oak, gum, wattle, native cherry-trees, and an occasional blackwood. In the hills its course was almost hidden by a profuse growth of loftier timber and thick shrubs, bending together and intertwining their branches over its bed. On the north-east bank, in a cleared space, stood the homestead, a low wooden building of some half-a-dozen rooms, surrounded by a paling garden-fence. It fronted up the stream, and at the back stood the detached kitchen, nearly abutting on to the bank of the creek. A little lower down was the stable, and beyond that the drafting yards. The road from the station passed these, continuing along the east bank for a mile, and then crossed in the direction of Talkie. The whole of the search party and residents assembled at the front gate facing up the creek.

‘Which way did you go, Mr. Gifford?’ asked the sergeant. ‘But first, what about all these sheep-tracks close round the fence?’

He was told how that had occurred.

‘It is most unfortunate,’ he observed; ‘we can track no one where a flock has passed so thickly just after heavy rain. Please lead on, Mr. Gifford.’

For some distance the sheep had completely obliterated all traces of the lovers’ footsteps, then the trackers picked them up and followed them to the log Floss pointed out as the one they sat on. Carefully the lynx-eyed blacks searched round, and finally declared that the tracks led back towards the house. Slowly but surely they worked their way without any great difficulty until the sheep’s feet-marks became close, then patiently on from sign to sign to within a few yards of the gate where the flock had rushed round the fence. There they were utterly at fault.

Circling the garden on the creek side, they took up Gifford’s tracks now alone, and followed them to the stable, where they ceased. They then endeavoured to find traces of the lost girl by making circles completely round the station of ever increasing radii, the sergeant searching up the stream

and satisfying himself that none of the water-holes were deep enough to hide a body. Then the trackers reported that no track like the girl's had gone from the house in any direction unless on the two lines where the flocks were driven, one going north and the other south. There the softness of the ground, in consequence of the heavy rain had allowed it to be trodden to a puddle by the sheep, and they were again at fault.

'Too much rain ; too much jumbuck,' objected they. 'No good, no good !'

By this time several of their countrymen from the Nob appeared in obedience to the commands of the sergeant, and were despatched to beat the scrub in all directions, men on horseback taking the wider range. All the rest of the day they searched, and according to arrangement, as night fell, met again at the starting-point. Last of all came Gifford. Every one had the same tale to tell ; no sign of the lost girl had been found.

As instructed, when beating the thick scrub, and less frequently in the open country, they had kept coo-eeing to each other ; and it seemed impossible that she could be alive anywhere near, otherwise she would have heard and answered.

It was now suggested that she might have wandered down to the edge of the lake and fallen in, or got entangled or lost in some of the reed-beds. The blacks had canoes on the water, and there were boats at the Elbow. The sergeant therefore gave instructions that a close examination should the next day be made in them along the margin of the river and lake, in conjunction with a party on the shore.

So another long, profitless day passed, without the slightest trace of Joan Grantley being discovered. Her aunt was now at the Creek with her remaining niece, the one trying to console the other with some hope, when hope was fast dying out. The whole thing was shrouded in mystery. It seemed inconceivable that the girl could have wandered away without leaving some trace by which the keenest trackers in the world could follow her up. True, heavy rain had fallen, and large

bodies of sheep in compact order had passed over the ground near the station; but further off they had spread out, and yet no track could be found after the strictest search.

On the evening of the second day Sergeant Wash sought a private interview with Mr. Enfield, and after describing the exhaustive examination of the margin of the lake and of the reeds, he said—

‘Now, sir, I feel it my duty to inform you that I cannot believe the young lady left your house on foot or by herself. In this opinion I am borne out by all the black trackers. Nor is she anywhere near here, dead or alive, because there is no place where she could be concealed that has not been searched.’

‘Well, then, what do you think has become of her?’ asked Enfield; ‘how could she have got away?’

‘I see you guess at my meaning,’ said the officer, looking in his troubled face. ‘As to your question, “How could she have got away?” I answer, “On Gifford’s horse!”’

‘But there were no tracks from near the gate to the stable,’ said Enfield with a start.

‘A strong man could easily carry her,’ was the brief reply.

‘But unless she went willingly, she would have screamed.’

‘Perhaps she had not the power.’

Again Enfield started. ‘Speak out, what do you suspect?’ he demanded, but in so low a tone that the other scarcely heard.

‘Is it true that your sister-in-law is subject to fainting-fits?’

‘Not often, but she has had several since I have known her.’

‘Well, she might have been carried off in one of them,’ answered the sergeant, with an intent look at Enfield.

‘By Heaven! I never thought of that,’ exclaimed he. ‘But why should he? The girl was fond of him—that I will swear to.’ Then he gazed steadily in the officer’s face. ‘By God, I know what you mean now, and don’t believe he could

be such a villain. If part of your surmise is true, and he was carried away by his passion sufficiently to do such a deed, Floss Gifford is not the man to add murder to it. No, sergeant, you had better dismiss such dreadful suspicions,' he added, all the more earnestly that they had occurred to himself.

'The fact that he is proved to have galloped off so fast gives colour to my theory,' was the cool retort.

'By the Lord,' angrily replied Enfield, 'you will persuade me directly that there is something in your vile notion!'

'As yet,' said Wash, 'there is no evidence, but to-morrow I intend having the horse-tracks followed, if they can be after so long a time has elapsed and so many have since gone up and down. We shall certainly be able to find if they leave the road anywhere, and if I discover any suspicious circumstances, I shall arrest Mr. Gifford.'

'Your theory is just the one that a police-officer would adopt,' replied Enfield, 'because there is no other apparent solution to the mystery; but, depend upon it, you are on the wrong scent. A suspicion of this sort came into my mind at first, I admit; but who can be in the company of the man you suspect, even for an hour, and believe him capable of such a diabolical crime?'

'Hundreds of people have believed in their friends as you do, but what say the annals of the police-courts? How many times in your own recollection has guilt been brought home to those who were deemed incapable of an evil thought? I don't suppose for an instant that this crime was premeditated, but the opportunity, the temptation came, which so many of the best men cannot resist. Then the deed had to be hidden somehow.'

'So he carried her off while still insensible—that is what you insinuate?'

'Nay,' replied the sergeant, 'I have not arrived at any conclusions as to where the actual crime took place. It may have been here or subsequent to her being carried off. In any case, reviewing the circumstances as they are presented

to me, I cannot but think they gravely compromise your friend. By-the-by, where is he to-night ?'

'Gone out to look for the girl you think he first outraged and then murdered,' said Enfield sternly.

'It may possibly be part of a deeply laid plan, and he may be missing to-morrow ; but, if he does attempt it, he will find it not so easy. Let that pass, however. As I have intimated, my men will be engaged to-morrow on the horse's trail. In the evening I will see you again. I presume you will continue the examination of the back-country with all the hands available ; it is useless trying to track her in that thick scrub.'

'Yes,' said Enfield, 'I will take care that much of the old ground and more new is gone over.'

'And don't suppose that I am actuated by any ill-feeling towards Mr. Gifford,' said the sergeant, as he rose to go. 'With appearances as much against you, I should have been quite as likely to suspect you.'

'Go to the devil !' shouted Enfield indignantly.

## CHAPTER XXXV

### DARK SUSPICIONS

WITHOUT waiting to witness the effect of his parting remark, the sergeant left the room, and a few minutes later Maria entered with a sad and troubled face. Sitting down near her husband, she said—

'The only thing I cannot find is her prayer-book. It is nowhere in her room, and she always kept it on her dressing-table.'

'Can she have taken it with her ?' he asked.

'Very likely, as I think I saw her reading it a little before she went out, and, hearing Floss leaving you, she might have hurriedly put it in her pocket. It has her name in it, so that if any one finds it he will know to whom it belongs.'

'Jem,' she whispered, 'we shall never see her alive again; perhaps the prayer-book may have been some comfort to her. I believe she has got lost somehow, away in the dreadful scrub. I am sure if I was once out there alone, I should never find my way back, and should die of fright; and she would feel just the same. Fancy what it must be at night, lost and alone, with the horrid wild dogs and snakes and things about one. This is the third night, Jem, dear, and she will be mad or dead before it is over, if she is not now. Each day, while you have been away, I have searched under every log and bush all round, but not a sign could I see.'

He looked at her sorrowfully. Should he tell her what the trooper had said? No, that would only increase the suffering she now endured.

'Has Floss,' he asked, 'confided more to you than he told the sergeant?'

'Only that she seemed so happy when he proposed to her. He can't bear to speak about it. Poor Floss, it's dreadful for him. And Roland—oh, Jem, he must be sent to.'

'Yes, dear, I intend sending a messenger to-morrow, and must write to-night. I put off doing so before, always hoping she would be found.'

When morning came, all hands were assembled to prosecute the search, not now with the eagerness evinced at the earlier stages. Most of them had given up all hope, and only continued in obedience to orders, many of the blacks loudly proclaiming that 'Muldarpie' (their evil spirit) had taken the missing woman; and it was evident that even the high rewards offered by Mr. Enfield would not induce them to penetrate into any places of which they had a superstitious dread. To obtain the best results from them, they were divided up among the whites, Floss assuming the command of one party and Enfield of the other. Again the country was well searched; flags that had been planted on the high hills were visited, in the hope that they had attracted the attention of the wanderer, and that she would be found by one of them. In many places fires had been kept up for the



same purpose, but all was in vain. When late at night the parties returned to the station, there was not a man or woman but now felt that Joan Grantley would never be discovered alive. Among the natives, tired and ill-tempered from having been compelled to continue a profitless pursuit all day, there was heard nothing but reiterated murmurs of 'Muldarpie' being at the bottom of it, and how stupid white fellows were for not recognising the fact as they did.

The sergeant had already arrived, and immediately led Enfield apart.

'I can see you have not discovered anything tending to solve the mystery,' he said; 'nor have I been more successful.'

'Am I to understand, then, that your suspicions are dispelled?'

'By no means. Though the tide was high—had indeed only fallen a very little—at the time Mr. Gifford left here, the tracks show that he went down to the beach at the Gap. I grant there is nothing to excite remark in that, as he probably did not know the state of the water, and preferred that road to Talkie; but, on the other hand, it would give an opportunity to dispose of the body by casting it into the sea.'

'Only to be washed up and found,' said Enfield, incredulously.

'You forget the tide was going out,' returned the officer, 'and that sharks abound in the bay, attracted by the whale-fishing. Then, again, I have found that he did not arrive at Talkie until nearly twelve o'clock, and was, consequently, close upon two hours riding twelve miles—a very long time considering the pace he started at. Only Joe Flapper, the cook's husband, was up waiting for him, as it appears he was expected.'

'Well, what does Joe say?' asked Enfield.

'Simply that Mr. Gifford was very silent, did not want anything, declined having supper, and, saying he knew his way, gave his horse to Flapper and went into the house.'

'All very natural for a man thinking of the girl he had just asked to marry him,' observed Enfield.

‘And just as natural for a man anxious to avoid observation,’ retorted the sergeant.

‘What about the night, or early morning?’

‘Nothing was heard or seen of him till daylight, when he appeared, and immediately started for the out-station to look for the lost sheep.’

‘Anything suspicious in that?’ inquired Enfield.

‘No,’ was the reply, almost regretfully uttered; ‘I am bound to admit that, with the exception of the length of time occupied on the journey and the going down to the beach at nearly high tide, all appears straight enough.’

‘No sign of a struggle anywhere?’

‘None that we could be sure about. At the Gap he certainly appears to have dismounted, but there is so much loose sand that nothing can be traced after an hour of a strong breeze such as blew that night.’

‘Well, sergeant, you seem to me to be trying hard to establish your theory of my friend’s guilt, with very indifferent success so far; and, as I have before told you, I feel sure you are quite wrong.’

‘Perhaps so; I shall, however, continue the search to-morrow for the body all along the coast, and, if nothing results, I shall be obliged to acknowledge I have failed to prove my case. At present I do not wish Mr. Gifford to know that I suspect him, but later I must ask him a few questions. Now as to future operations. It is the end of the third day since she was missed, and the chance of finding her alive is a very remote one; but I am anxious to do everything in my power, not only to carry out my own ideas, but any suggestion you can offer.’

‘I am at my wits’ end,’ said Enfield sadly; ‘to-day we have gone over a wide range of country, but in that dense scrub we might pass close by and never see her.’

‘You mean if she is dead or too weak to call out?’ asked the trooper. ‘I am afraid you are right. If lost out there, she could scarcely survive so long. Still, try again in the morning in other directions. I may find some-

thing on the Murray beach that will set all at rest. Good-night.'

As soon as the sergeant had left, Enfield joined his friend. Gloomy, haggard, and with wild, feverish eyes, he looked as if he had not slept since the disappearance of the girl he had just asked to be his bride.

'What more can we do, Jem?' he exclaimed. 'I feel as if I must go mad, if this continues longer.'

'It's hard on us all, old man,' replied Enfield; 'harder still on you; but it has to be borne. We must try again to-morrow—in the scrub. The sergeant is going to search the beach.'

'Why the beach?' said the other with some surprise.

'He thinks she may have got in the sea, though I don't understand how—do you?'

'No! no!' said Floss impatiently, 'she is somewhere in the bush. She must have wandered away from the gate after I left her, instead of entering the house, and so got lost.'

'But we have beaten the country so thoroughly,' answered Enfield, 'for miles round, that I cannot think it possible for her to have failed to hear or see us.'

'Ah, but we possibly were not near her during the first or even the second day, and after that she might well be too weak to attract our attention. Think what it must have been, alone in the dense scrub by one of those dismal swamps, probably hearing, perhaps even seeing us, and unable to call out!'

'It would be awful; for God's sake, don't dwell on it, Gifford! It's bad enough without allowing one's imagination full swing.'

Floss made no answer, and after lingering a few minutes more he turned and went his own way. He had no desire for rest, but excessive fatigue overcame him, and this night he made no attempt to leave the station. For some hours he wandered about in an aimless, fitful manner in the immediate vicinity of the house, and then, retiring to his

room, sank into a disturbed slumber which lasted until daylight.

Miss Grantley had in a great measure recovered her wonted composure.

‘I shall never like Australia again, Maria,’ she said, ‘after such a dreadful tragedy as this, for we shall never see poor Joan any more. We know she is not at any of the stations or farms round, and, if out in that awful bush, why, any of us poor women would die of fright the first night—that is certain.’ Past weeping now, her niece could only sigh.

‘I am sure I should, aunt ; but we don’t know that Joan did get lost. Oh ! I wonder if we shall ever know what has become of her !’

‘I don’t believe she did,’ said Miss Grantley. ‘My firm conviction is that there has been foul play.’

‘Oh, aunt !’ ejaculated Mrs. Enfield, horror-stricken, ‘don’t say that ; who would be likely to touch the poor girl ?’

‘That I cannot say ; perhaps the blacks or some of the whites we little think of. There have been cases before of women being carried off by both kinds of horrid wretches and afterwards murdered. Of course, your husband would call this nonsense, as all men do when we think of things that never strike them ; but I can’t sit down quietly like some people and have no ideas at all. Oh dear ! oh dear ! I do wish Roland had been here,’ and Aunt Arabella sank into her chair and wept copiously.

The fourth day broke cold and wet, but once more the search party started on their melancholy quest. Their numbers were much thinned now, for many had given it up as utterly hopeless. A few with stern, resolute faces rode all day long, often watching where the great eagle-hawks and crows rose from, fearing there to find all that remained of the lost one. But Australia’s winged scavengers led them to nothing more than a slaughtered kangaroo, sheep, or opossum. As each tired horseman returned home at night, it was with the settled conviction that everything possible had been done to save the unfortunate girl ; and so thorough

had been the search that few believed she had ever entered the scrub at all. Their suspicions pointed to a dark deed done by some one yet to be discovered.

‘Have you anything to communicate, Sergeant Wash, or has your day resulted, like ours, in no discovery?’ said Enfield.

‘Absolutely nothing,’ replied that worthy dejectedly; ‘and, as I have received information calling me to the other side of the district, I must discontinue my efforts for the present. Perhaps when I return some clue may have been found, or may have developed itself, as is so often the case, though we are apt to claim the credit of finding it ourselves. The whole district, indeed the colony, is roused by such a painful occurrence, and it may, therefore, be cleared up at any moment in the most unexpected way.’

‘But you do not think she can be alive?’

‘No,’ replied the sergeant; ‘I fear that is beyond the pale of possibility. Before I go, I desire to ask Mr. Gifford a few questions, and, as you are a magistrate, please be present; in good time here he comes.’

When several remarks had passed, the officer said—

‘How long did it take you, Mr. Gifford, to ride from here to Talkie last Thursday night, after you left Miss Joan?’

Floss started, but, steadying himself, replied—

‘About two hours, I think, or a trifle less.’

‘Why were you so long going twelve miles?’

‘I hardly know; at first I rode hard, then pulled up to a walk or a slow trot and began thinking about her,’ and his voice shook.

‘Any other reason?’ asked the trooper.

‘Yes, I turned on the beach at the Gap, but the tide was so high I could only get along slowly. But why the devil do you make these inquiries?’ demanded the angry young man fiercely. ‘Good God! you don’t suspect me?’

‘My duty compels me,’ was the stern answer, ‘to endeavour to clear up every act of any person known to have been last in the company of the missing lady, so far as we can. I gather that you were the last person to see her. It becomes

you, therefore, to relate everything you did between leaving the Creek and arriving at Talkie.'

'There is absolutely nothing further to relate or explain. You are in possession of everything without reservation or evasion.'

'Very well, Mr. Gifford, I wish to ask no more questions at present,' and the officer left the room.

'Enfield, as an old friend, for God's sake tell me, what does he suspect me of doing?'

'Before your statement he thought the only way she could have left the place was on your horse,' the other replied reluctantly. 'I don't know that he thinks so now.'

'I take her away? Would to heaven I had—then she would be alive now. But I must be mad to say so, for the thought never entered my head; for not a hair of hers would I have injured to save my soul, and not even for love of me would she have gone. Why do you look like that? Is it possible he thinks that I murdered her—perhaps worse? James Enfield, tell me that you believe no word of this diabolical suggestion.'

'As God is my witness, old friend, I do not doubt you,' fervently said the other.

'I knew it could not be that my old chum had lent himself to such a damnable slander; but how shall I clear myself of the vile web of suspicion cast around me? My darling, your fate is almost to be preferred to mine! By God, Enfield, this mystery must be solved; now I realise that I am suspected, I begin to suspect others. There are plenty of bad characters in the ranges; can they have carried her off?'

'Not in the least likely,' answered Enfield. 'You left her at the gate; we were awake in the house and must have heard if anything of the kind had been attempted, as she would certainly have called out or run into the house. No, in my opinion the theory of foul play must fall to the ground, unless it took place away from the gate.'

'I believe I shall go mad if this continues,' said Gifford; 'I am so dazed and bewildered I cannot think the matter

out. Good-night ; it is vain for me to dream of sleep ; I shall go and look for her. Since searching by day is useless, I 'll try the night once more.'

Enfield's eyes followed him with a look of infinite pity. 'Poor chap,' said he, 'he has enough to bear, in all conscience, without the sergeant's suspicions.'

## CHAPTER XXXVI

## VENUS VICTRIX

WHAT of Roland Grantley meanwhile ? On the evening of his sister's disappearance he is in the same hut where he and Darkie sat when they arranged the details of the latter's flight. There is scarcely any light in the room, and the young squatter sits on a roughly made chair in gloomy silence, which is now becoming habitual to him. The dreamy eyes, always a remarkable feature, are now more dreamy than ever, but the greatest change is in the once clear, open brow. Deep lines are beginning to show, the result of continual brooding over his short-lived happiness. His thoughts appear to be ever dwelling upon his own woes, and it is indeed so. As he rides over the plains and hills and through the woodlands of the run, which is his daily occupation, or tosses on the rude couch where once he slept so soundly, his meditations always carry him back to his lost love. At first, after leaving Encounter Bay, he sternly resolved to cast it all away from him by assiduous attention to business. Impatient and angry with himself for a weakness he scorned, yet could not conquer, for weeks he contended against it.

'Forget her ! Yes, since she has forgotten and forsaken me,' he thought, 'I certainly will.'

The night was the worst to bear. In the daytime, by violent and continuous exercise, he found some degree of peace, and often prolonged his rides far into the darkness ; and then, loth to trust himself to that restless bed for so many weary hours, he walked about the station until utter weariness

ness compelled him to desist. When he slept she always seemed there, with the mournful look of reproach she wore on her face when he told her she could never be his bride. Or, if he did not see her, worse still was the never-ceasing consciousness of her loss. Yet he did not repent and reconcile himself to the inevitable. No ; some peace and consolation might ultimately have come from such a mood ; but his state of mind was rather one of fierce, determined resistance and refusal to accept his defeat as final.

‘ Her love will be too strong for her—I shall win her yet,’ he muttered, ‘ and gratify at once my passion and revenge.’

To accomplish that would be something ; but he rarely ceased to feel that, since she had become a wife, she had not the same charm for him, and he ground his teeth at the thought.

As he sat thus, a sound of cantering hoofs approaching caught his ear. ‘ The post at last,’ he said, as he opened the door and walked out to meet the rider.

‘ Only a light bag for you, Mr. Grantley. I ’ll stay to-night, if you don’t mind, as it is late, and then can take on anything you have for me in the morning.’

‘ All right ; they will make you comfortable in the kitchen,’ was the brief reply, as Roland carried his mail in.

There were several papers, a circular, which he cast aside impatiently, and two letters, one in the handwriting he would never forget. He gazed at the letter until his eyes grew dim ; then felt it, as if he expected to find something inside. It seemed as if there were a soft, yielding substance within, and, feeling that, he tore the paper gently apart, opened the enclosure, and a lock of dark hair twined, as he thought, lovingly about his fingers.

On the paper a few lines were written, indistinctly, and with many words scored out, as if the writer doubted what to say. They ran :

‘ Perhaps I am doing wrong, but, when we were parting, I promised to send you a lock of my hair. I cut it off while I was free, so that I surely wrong no one in sending it. It might be better to break



this promise, but I never broke one to you before, and cannot do it now. Farewell for ever.

PETREL.'

'No, not for ever,' he vowed. 'I will take you in my arms once more, and learn then if I must abandon all hope. I will start to-morrow; the Star will do the journey in less than a week. Now, what says my accommodating correspondent at Encounter Bay?' he added, taking up the other letter.

'DEAR MR. GRANTLEY,—She is living at Melbourne, in Rock Street, No. 10. He is at the diggings. She would never forgive me if she knew I told you, but I can't refuse you anything. Hoping to see you here soon,

'LIZZIE.'

'That settles it. I now know the address and that she is alone; but, by Heaven, if he is with her, I will learn my fate none the less; and if she is willing, not all the marriage-rites or husbands on earth shall keep her from me.'

The night was over at length, and Roland rose weary, but eager to be in motion.

Always quick and decisive when a determination had been arrived at, he rapidly made the necessary preparations for his departure. He told the working overseer that he had received important letters requiring his immediate presence in Melbourne, but that he would certainly be back in a little over a fortnight; and it satisfied not only that functionary, but the other employés that the master was called away by urgent private business.

It might be that the rich men of the other side wanted to buy the run, or possibly the boss was on the look-out for a good thing himself.

'He's not been the same man,' said the cook, 'since he came down this time. Too soft-hearted, maybe, and can't forget being took up for that nigger business, though why a man should bother about shooting a yardful of them devils, I don't know!'

'You bet it's not the shooting,' said another sage; 'it's being put in quod that his sort don't like.'

'Well, mate,' replied the cook, with a wink, 'you know it takes time to get accustomed to that sort of thing and feel at home like.'

'Stow your jaw,' said the other; 'we are on the square now, and had best keep all that to ourselves. Here comes the boss.'

In the afternoon Roland mounted the Star, and, leading another horse that carried his pack, rode off with the intention of reaching a station thirty miles distant that night. We will not follow him on the journey, but will anticipate his arrival in the straggling township that has since well earned the title of Queen of the South. He left his horses in the country and availed himself of a mail-coach for the last twenty miles. Late at night it rolled into Melbourne, and drew up at the post-office with the usual imposing dash, leading the uninitiated to believe that her Majesty's mail always traverses the colony at tremendous speed.

Early in the morning our hero left his hotel on his evil quest. Rock Street was soon found, a straggling thoroughfare continuing out on to the open country until it was lost in permanent bush. A loquacious costermonger told him that the street ended at the cross-roads, and the houses were not numbered.

'No. 10? How could there be such a building? Anyhow, he had never heard of it in that part. Well, then, look for it yourself,' and in great dudgeon the seller of bad fruit trundled his barrow off, muttering something about the meanness of some people. Roland counted to the tenth house, and then entered a butcher's shop. Remembering his experience with the costermonger, he ordered a pound of sausages.

'Can you tell me,' he asked, 'who lives in that cottage, faced with brick, over the way?'

'Mrs. Brown,' was the answer.

'Oh no, not that one! it was the tenth house on this side I meant.'

'That's empty,' said the man of beef and mutton briefly, as he turned to another customer.

SNUG  
COVE



PHOTO: CAPTAIN WEIR



‘ Not much information for this d——d pound of sausages which I don’t know what to do with. Am I to buy something useless of each tradesman to propitiate him, every time I ask a question ? ’

Luckily a postman came along. ‘ The beggar has nothing to sell,’ said Roland. ‘ He ’s my man ;’ and, forcing himself to utter the detested name, he asked if a Mrs. Turnstile lived in the neighbourhood.

‘ Yes, in that house with the green gate ; but she left about a week ago. No, he did not know where she went, but out of his beat, anyhow.’

Flinging the sausages savagely at the green gate, Grantley betook himself back to breakfast. Was there ever such cursed bad luck ? But, as she only left so recently, it must be easy to trace her, he thought.

Unable to rest, he was soon back in Rock Street, determined to inquire of the residents of the houses adjacent to her late home. At one was a girl with shapely arms, cleaning windows, and with her he began operations.

He was a relative, he said, of the lady who lately occupied the next cottage, and had come unexpectedly to Melbourne to see her. He now understood she had moved, and he was unable to discover where. Could she, with the kindness for which her sex was proverbial, suggest anything to help a forlorn stranger who felt at a great loss ?

By the time this artful little speech was over, it was evident the sympathies of the girl were enlisted. Help such a pleasant-spoken young man ?—that she would ! Unfortunately, she did not know the lady’s whereabouts, but a friend of hers was acquainted with the girl who lived with her, and, no doubt, would be informed of their present address.

‘ I shall see her early this evening, when it ’s my night out for a walk,’ she added significantly.

‘ At what time and where shall I meet you ? ’ asked the base deceiver.

These preliminaries were promptly settled, and, with many backward glances as he walked away, the damsel

pursued her avocation. What was to be done now? Surely something until the time came when he was to meet the expectant charmer. There was a grocer's shop round the corner; he would inquire there.

'Oh yes!' said the shopman, 'we know the lady in question. Here is a parcel to be sent to her in Grey Street, but there is no number or other direction.'

Here was a clue at last, and obviously a cab was the best means of following it up.

Hailing one, Roland gave instructions to drive to Grey Street, and then slowly from one end to the other. That done, he felt just about as near his object as before, and, when cabby requested further instructions, scarcely knew what to answer. He now began to experience that uncomfortable feeling that so frequently oppresses those engaged in pursuits the nature of which they have the strongest reasons for concealing—namely, that every one appeared to be watching him and regarding his proceedings with suspicion.

Impatient and annoyed, he dismissed the grinning cabman with a fare that he might reasonably suppose would stop his propensity to chaff, but it did not.

'Any other locality as I could drive you to, sir, as would suit you? There's Yarra Bend, as I could recommend, where they keeps strait-waistcoats and takes in similar cases to yours, sir.'

This last Parthian shot considerably discomposed Grantley; but, deeming that an altercation with the facetious Jehu would not assist him, he simply told him to go to the devil, and marched round the corner. Here were two shops, but at neither could he hear anything of her he sought. After strolling up and down for a while, he gave it up, and determined to wait until he met the maid of the shapely arms.

His appointment with her was for late in the evening, but as dusk set in he could control his impatience no longer, and started off to Grey Street again. He had only gone a few yards along it when, in a little garden fronting a cottage, he saw the slight and perfect form he had come so far to seek.

Another moment and he was beside her, drinking in the glad love-light that shone in those melting dark eyes. He grasped her hands, drew her into the house, and took her yielding form into his arms with a clasp that she was powerless to resist.

‘Come, my Pet,’ he whispered, ‘I will take you far away from here. You are mine by all the ties of love; break the vile chains that bind you. Come, love, come!’

She looked at his agitated face with a great pity. ‘You must have suffered much, or you would not talk so wildly,’ she said.

He almost flung her from him at the words.

‘And is it to be in vain,’ he said, ‘that I follow you far, with a love that is ready to give up all for your sake? Can you abandon nothing, not even the solitary home that the man they forced upon you has left you in?’

She staggered to his side, and, seizing his hand, sank upon her knees and murmured:

‘Oh, if you had but asked me this, even on the evening of that fatal day! but now, cannot you see how great would be my sin and yours? Oh, think of my father!’

He pushed her hand away, and the old pride broke forth—

‘I forget my name and fame, my nearest and dearest, I blast my future, for my love; and you can think only of the pitiful crew who have undone us both. Do you think I do not know my own power here alone with you? Do not start—you were never safer from violence in your mother’s arms than now—in your husband’s house. But burst the trammels that fetter and degrade you, for the wife who marries without love is, in my eyes, living in a degradation not far removed from that of the lowest street-walker that paces the city pavement to-night. Come to the man who loves you, and whom you love, and be my darling through life till death!’

She sank on a couch, and, with covered face, wept convulsively. Bending over her, his voice became soft and low—

‘Say but one word, and I will bear my little dove where none shall ever know the past, or why or whence we came.’

Till late that evening he urged her, and left her at last triumphant. She could resist no longer ; she loved him, and to-morrow would fly with him, it mattered not where. How different life looked now to him ! Both love and revenge would be his ; the laugh and jest he would repay by snatching her from them. He had felt humiliated by his defeat and loss ; but in the hour of victory he strode through the streets with the elated air of a conqueror.

## CHAPTER XXXVII

### BAULKED

THE night passed in dreams of bliss and gratified revenge. Petrel would love and trust him with a perfect faith, and he would repay her by the fervency and depth of his affection and constancy. As for that clod who had presumed to come between him and his love, let him suffer—if that dull nature could—a fitting retribution.

‘It cannot be half the hell I have endured lately,’ he thought ; ‘but that is over, and in her arms I shall forget the past.’

During the morning he made all the necessary arrangements for their flight, and then passed the rest of the day in a fever of excitement and anxiety. The slow hours dragged out at last, and he stood at the cottage door ; a light shone in the front sitting-room, but he walked round to the back and, lifting a latch, stepped lightly in along the passage. ‘Petrel!’ he called, and a door opened. That was not the fair form he had come to seek, though it was a woman who stood there. With a gesture she motioned him into the room. Hope and triumph died out of his face, for there was that in hers that told him to nerve himself for a bitter disappointment.

‘Where is Petrel?’ he demanded.

‘Beyond your reach, Mr. Grantley ; and I would that all



those who, like you, try to step between man and wife were similarly treated. She left this morning at daybreak to join her husband.'

He drew himself up, though his pale face grew white with anguish. 'Is there no message? Did she leave nothing for me?'

'None—nothing,' was the laconic answer.

'Have some mercy,' he urged; 'what passed between you?'

'I will tell you this much. Last night, after you left her, she sought me in great distress, and said she must join her husband at once. I arranged for her how to go, and by this time she is with him and safe from you. Go, young man, repent, and thank God that you have been foiled.'

'Repent, and thank God that I have lost her? why, heaven without her would be worthless to me,' he answered scornfully. 'Yet I don't blame you;' and he passed out.

Then his stern denouncer burst into tears of pity for the handsome young stranger who had dared so much and travelled so far in pursuit of his lost love.

Roland Grantley paced the streets for hours with a tempest of contending passions raging in his breast, one moment cursing Petrel as the basest of deceivers, and the next bitterly reproaching himself for ever letting her out of his sight.

'I might have known,' he said, 'that, with time for reflection and that she-dragon to assist her, she would give me the slip. It is only when I am present she forgets her people and the ties that bind her to them. Now I am indeed fooled, outwitted in the hour of my triumph. Dolt! to have the dearest object of my life within my grasp, and then allow it to elude me! I will not bear this hell of self-torture alone, in a city like this: there are those who are ever willing to console us for the sorrows inflicted by their sisters. I'll quaff the sparkling bowl and listen to the jest and song: better anything than remembrance.'

A week later our hero with bitter self-reproach took his seat in the coach on his homeward journey. He had

compressed into those few days a considerable knowledge of the life that dissipated young men lead, and found it beneath contempt. For a brief period he had thought less of Petrel, and, as to think was to suffer, he suffered less ; but the reaction came.

‘What,’ he asked himself, ‘were those vile creatures compared to her innocent loveliness ? Accept this riotous animalism for the rapture he had missed, and hope to be comforted and consoled ? No ;’ and he turned from it in despairing disgust. ‘Better go back to the solitary life in the bush, and eat his heart away.’ Before starting, he determined to go once more to the cottage, where he had seen her last. Possibly she might be there ; how, or why, did not occur to him, for he had never doubted the tale told by that hateful, exultant woman, of her having gone to her husband.

The house was empty, with a notice up stating it was to let, inquiries to be made at the shop round the corner. There he was informed the late tenants had hurriedly left for the country, a week’s rent having been paid in advance to cancel the agreement. The reason assigned for leaving was that the lady’s husband had sent for her.

It was enough. He quite understood now that she had determined to escape from him, and his delay gave her the opportunity. The ‘she-dragon’ was of course ready to assist, and so he had been foiled. He chafed with impotent rage as he thought, not of Petrel’s action, but of his own folly in being so easily deceived.

Now, on top of the coach, he had time to coolly review all. It seemed surprising that he could have passed twenty-four hours without being once struck with the probability that some measures would be taken to defeat his object. Petrel’s companion was a relative of her husband, and therefore certain to use every expedient and employ all her influence in his favour. Through this woman he had lost her once more ; but there was some consolation in the conviction that she loved him still.

With all the energy of his nature he now longed to be back

at work ; and when the mail journey was over, and he mounted the Star, with his face set homeward, he almost forgot his consuming grief. Riding steadily, with a true bushman's judgment, so as to spare his horses, he kept going for long hours each day. Though he tired himself and the pack-horse also, the incomparable Star never showed a symptom of fatigue. With his springy stride, keeping the led animal at a jog-trot, he covered the ground as fast at the close as at the beginning of the journey.

When the station was reached, whatever the rider might feel, the steeds showed their appreciation of home, the Star waiting with the gentle, patient manner of the favourite horse until the bridle was removed from his bended head and Roland had caressingly rubbed his ears, when he trotted off to join the mob and hear the news.

From the eagerness with which animals rejoin their companions after a long absence, it is evident that not only is there affection subsisting between them, but also mutual understanding, and probably some means of communication also. Who that has travelled long journeys with cattle has failed to observe one or two deeply attached couples among them ? It might be a pair of bullocks, or one of either sex, or even two cows, not even related in any way : yet, somehow, a spontaneous affection has sprung up between them passing the love of David and Jonathan. Day by day these two walk side by side, and, when camping-time comes, lie down together. If by any chance they are separated, their distress is marked by piteous lowing, till the happy meeting comes, when there is much mutual licking and other caresses. Such deep love among the brutes is well known to drovers. It is most marked in the case of twins, which not infrequently are so attached to each other that they cannot bear to be separated for a moment.

The Star did not seem to have a predilection for any one horse in particular ; his affections seemed to be comprehensive enough to take in the whole station-mob. There is no doubt that he was the acknowledged leader, gentle in his

sway, but suffering no liberties to be taken with him. Leaving him to resume his reign, therefore, we will follow his master into the dwelling.

There is no one at home but the cook, but he informs 'the boss' that on the whole everything has been going on well. Black Bob had indeed lost his sheep once, but most of them were recovered by the overseer the same day. A lot were missing now out of another flock at the Red Lake, and all hands were after them; that was why he was alone.

'D——n the shepherds,' said Grantley savagely; 'they are the curse of a squatter's life. I never come back but there is the same tale to hear. Bring me my letters.'

Apparently they did not please him either, as one after the other they were glanced through and cast aside.

'Now we will see what Enfield has to say about Encounter Bay matters,' he muttered to himself, little dreaming of the thunderbolt hanging over his head.

The letter was not long. It briefly stated that Joan had been lost for three days, how it had occurred, and what was being done to find her, and concluded by saying that they had not given up hope, but feared the worst. The note was dated twelve days since, so that either she was found or the worst had happened. He now saw the letter was unstamped, and therefore must have come by private messenger. In great agitation he questioned the cook, and learned that, within a week of his departure for Melbourne, a horseman arrived with the intelligence of his sister's disappearance; that he remained three days; then, not knowing what to do, he had returned.

With bitter self-reproach, Roland now thought of his selfish, wicked journey.

'If I had remained at my post here, I should have been available when sent for, though too late to save my poor sister in all human probability. What will they think of me when they know, as know they must, my errand to Melbourne?' What a potent thing is love, either for evil or for good! Alas, in his case it seemed all for evil! but then with

him it was not only love, but passion. He knew that in the gratification of his passion he had cared little for the wrong he was prepared to inflict upon the woman whose trust he had betrayed. Yet against all others he would defend her to the last drop of his blood, if that were necessary. But what availed such idle reasoning? Let him look at the naked truth.

No evil threatened her, except, indeed, from himself; yet, regardless of other duties and claims, he journeyed long and far to induce her to break the most sacred ties and enter upon a life of shame with him. The bitterness of failure followed, and, as if that were not punishment enough, possibly another consequence was the loss of his favourite sister. Certainly he had debarred himself of the satisfaction of doing his utmost to save her.

Weighing all the circumstances, he could not but feel there was cause for lasting shame in the occurrences of the last few weeks, and the only reparation in his power must be made by starting for Encounter Bay without delay.

Accordingly, the morrow saw Roland again in the saddle—not now on the Star, as that noble steed had too recently been severely tried for his owner to so soon subject him to another hard journey. Three days' fast riding brought him to the Creek as night fell. He left his horse at the gate so often mentioned, and walked in, opening the door for himself, for he saw Maria's face at a window, and knew that she waited for him within.

'Oh, Rolly, come at last!' To his sensitive ear the words conveyed a world of reproach.

'Before you blame me, say is she found or not?'

'No, not a sign, and now there can be no hope whatever. Some people maintain there has been foul play, otherwise she must have been seen or heard of. Jem will be so glad to talk to you about the matter. He doesn't know what to think. Now let me show you to your room. You look dreadfully tired and worn.'

And, when she left him, she had a quiet cry in sheer pity

of the suffering which was so apparent in the once clear, unruffled young face.

Presently Enfield came in, and the two held a long and serious consultation. Roland was made acquainted with the whole of the circumstances surrounding the mystery. There was a protracted silence ; then the latter said—

‘ Maria tells me that people suspect foul play. Whom does she mean, and what is your opinion ? ’

‘ I hardly like to repeat idle gossip,’ Enfield replied ; ‘ but you may as well hear it from me as from another. Probably Sergeant Wash gave rise to the suspicions, which now generally point at Gifford. As for me, since you inquire what I think, I cannot believe anything against my old friend so much to his prejudice. Besides, his whole conduct from the night she was missed seems to me to stamp him as an innocent man.’

‘ Is there any one else accused by the district wiseacres ? ’ asked Grantley.

‘ No particular individual ; but there has been some talk of the blacks, as well as of the whites living in the tiers and ranges, who are mostly cattle-stealers and men of indifferent character.’

‘ Put the aborigines out of the question,’ said Roland ; ‘ I feel confident they have had no hand in this. A few of the whites I would not trust, if an opportunity offered ; but how could this be, unless they found her wandering in the scrub ? It is absurd to suppose they took her from the gate ; they would never dare to do it ; so we will dismiss that idea as not only improbable but impracticable. With reference to Floss’s statement, again, if he brought her back to the gate, why did she leave it ? and how, without leaving tracks that any half-blind black fellow might run up ? But then you say the tracks could not be followed there. On the whole, however, I am not surprised at the conclusion of the sergeant. It’s lucky for Gifford that we have such faith in him ; had he been anything less than the friend he is, he would certainly be charged with murder.’

Enfield was silent for a while, then he said—

‘I have thought of it all as you now do, but one moment with Floss dissipated my doubts. I now believe she wandered away down to the lake and got in somehow.’

‘Does he agree with you?’

‘No; he steadfastly maintains she strolled away into the scrub after he left her, scarcely realising where she was going, and, becoming bewildered, has perished in the bush. Night after night he went out making fires and coo-eeing.’

‘It seems rather useless for me to search, when all have failed,’ replied Grantley; ‘but I will do my best. For the sake of us all, the matter ought to be cleared up, though we must relinquish all hope of ever seeing poor Joan alive again.’

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

### ATÉ AT WORK AGAIN

DAY by day, after his conversation with Enfield, Roland prosecuted an unceasing search for his lost sister with all the energy of his character. Always a favourite with the aborigines, and possessing great influence over them, he exerted himself successfully to induce them to make another and final examination of the surrounding country. Large rewards for the recovery of the missing girl, alive or dead, excited their ardour for a time; but as before, when they assembled without result at their camp, there soon arose murmurs of ‘Muldarpie.’

When he approached, those cries became more pronounced and general, and it was evident they were too thoroughly impregnated with the idea that the evil one had taken his poor sister to search efficiently in future. The third morning verified this opinion; most of the men expostulated with him for desiring them to continue when the spirit they feared had taken the matter into his own hands, and the others sat stolidly in the wurlies or made their way back to the seashore.

Gifford had joined him, and the two, seeing no more good

service was to be obtained from their black allies, spent several days in beating the scrub. It was then that Roland first realised what a hopeless task it was to thoroughly examine the depths of the dense, and frequently all but impenetrable, mass of bushes. It seemed that hundreds, nay thousands, of the dead might lie undiscovered within a small radius of the hill on which he stood. While the poor wanderer was living, moving, and capable of answering shouts or signals, the difficulties were great; but they were incalculably increased now that life must be long extinct.

He could not but feel the deepest admiration for the persistent determination Floss had evinced during the fruitless search. But a settled hopelessness was now apparent in him, and he offered no further suggestions, in marked contrast to his former conduct, when in rapid succession he had ever some new idea to carry out.

At the end of their last day, as they were slowly returning to the station, Gifford suddenly said—

‘You must have heard of the vile suspicion which attaches to me in the minds of many of the residents of this neighbourhood. I do not ask if you doubt me, for you could not have met me as you have, and ridden by my side day after day, had you done so.’

‘Possibly I could not,’ answered Grantley; ‘but there are men who would act the part for the very purpose of tracing the crime they suspected. I fancy Sergeant Wash is such a one. On second thoughts, I believe I should also, if once convinced of the guilt of my companion.’

‘I want you to tell me what to do,’ said Gifford. ‘Until now I would not leave the district, because doing so might give colour to the insinuations, but you may imagine how I hate the place, and long to be away.’

‘Go to the Tatiara,’ replied Grantley. ‘I will acquaint Wash with your intention.’

Floss winced. ‘What! do you think he still suspects me, and is apprehensive that I may bolt?’

‘There is no doubt you are in that unfortunate position,



and only those who know you best can disabuse their minds of the impression. Surely the mystery will be solved some day ; meantime, you cannot leave the country, at least for years, without adding to the distrust with which you are regarded.'

'I will start for the Tatiara to-morrow,' said Gifford. 'Action of any kind is preferable to brooding here under the intolerable burden I have to bear. Find out from Sergeant Wash if I am at liberty to go ; I won't risk arrest.'

That night Grantley rode to the police-station on the Point, and found that the officer he was seeking was at home.

'I have called,' he said, 'in reference to the case of my lost sister.'

The sergeant looked grave.

'I wish, Mr. Grantley, I could help you ; but, unless you are prepared to go further than your brother-in-law, I don't see what I can do.'

'To what do you refer ?'

'To my desire to arrest Floss Gifford, which Mr. Enfield opposes, both in his capacity of magistrate and relative of the lost lady.'

'If you think fit, you can arrest him without consulting either of us,' said Roland.

'I am perfectly aware of that ; but, considering I have no evidence, I do not care to incur the responsibility with the relatives of the murdered girl against me.'

'Why do you make such a fearful charge, when you acknowledge there is no evidence ?'

'Because it is impossible to account in any other way for her disappearance. Ask yourself—is it likely that she would ever have left the gate, if brought back to it, to go wandering alone in a place of which she knew so little ? What could her object be ?'

'I admit the force of your contention ; but it is not always possible to account for what men and women will do, though it seems to me not improbable that she might have turned back to the log where Gifford says they were sitting, for something she had dropped or missed.'

'Then where were the tracks?' asked Wash. 'I will swear she never went back there or near it.'

'But she possibly got lost in trying to find it,' persisted Roland.

'I again ask, where are the tracks?' said the policeman.

'I am told that both the sheep and the rain obliterated all traces for some distance round the station,' replied Grantley, 'and the same cause would effect the same result on the two strips of country the flocks passed over in drawing away, one to the north and the other nearly south—maybe one of them right on her trail.'

'That is conceivable,' said the sergeant, 'and, where the sheep spread out so as to give a chance of tracking, the ground was very hard, and the rain undoubtedly would wash out the slight footprints of a girl; but, for all that, I feel sure we must have either found her, or traces of her, if she went in one direction or the other.'

'Then what is your solution?' asked Roland.

'That she was never taken back to the gate, but carried, probably in an insensible condition, to the horse, and so away to the sea. He certainly dismounted at the Gap; the rest can be imagined.'

'If I could believe anything so fiendish of Floss Gifford, he would scarcely need your kind offices; but there must be more cogent reasons advanced than you have given before any man, much more an intimate friend, can be accused of so dark a crime.'

'As I have already intimated,' replied the sergeant, 'I feel that I cannot act without the co-operation of the relatives. If you would denounce him, my course would be clear.'

'That is impossible,' said the other, 'while we are confident he is guiltless. If you can bring any further evidence against him or any one else, do it. I am eager to avenge my poor sister, if wrong has been done her; but let us have no false accusations to damn a man's reputation and blight his life. I know enough of that sort of thing already. Better that the crime, if crime there be, should go for ever unpunished.'

There is another phase of the matter I wish to consult you about. Mr. Gifford, acting on my advice, desires to return to his station in the south-east ; I hope you see no objection ? ’

‘ None whatever, now I have had this conversation with you,’ was the answer. ‘ I need not tell you that we shall carefully watch his movements, and, if he attempt to leave the colony, it will be awkward for him. For the present I prefer his being there rather than here.’

Grantley was on the point of asking the meaning of the last ambiguous phrase, but the trooper had turned away ; so, bidding him good-night, he mounted his horse and rode on to Talkie with an added gloom on his grave young brow. He had dearly loved Joan, and the peculiarly painful circumstances attending her disappearance still affected him deeply, though he was now aware that, even if he had not been absent in Melbourne, he would have been unable to reach the Creek in time to save her. It was therefore mere weakness to reproach himself for being away when the messenger came, whatever censorious people might say. No, the design that Petrel should elope with him had failed for the present ; but so far was he from repenting of his endeavour to carry it into effect, that he meant to repeat the attempt on the earliest opportunity.

The interview with the sergeant much troubled him. While not a brilliant officer, that functionary had the reputation of being a smart, clear-headed man. He had unravelled the tangles of more than one intricate case, and somehow he impressed Grantley with the idea that he knew, or suspected, more than he thought proper to divulge.

‘ My God ! ’ thought the young squatter, ‘ what a life is mine with this sword of Damocles perpetually hanging over me, ready to fall any day on the return or apprehension of the absconder ; the only woman I shall ever love gone from me ; and now my dearest sister’s melancholy fate a mystery I almost dread to see solved ! One calamity has followed another, until I weary of this place, and must leave it to seek new scenes. I shall go to the far out-districts of New South

Wales, and take up country on the Darling. Away from old familiar objects, I shall at least be less frequently reminded of so much that brings back painful recollections.'

Such reflections had often occupied him during the last few days. The Tatiara station was hateful ever since that well-remembered shooting fray, the subsequent flight of Darkie, and his own arrest. Talkie was still more so: he could move his eyes in no direction without being reminded of Petrel and his humiliation—for such he felt her loss to be. Day by day the feeling grew more bitter and his temper more morose. It was a living hell for him to pass over the very places where she used to meet and sit with him. The grand old headland that met his glance at every turn spoke only of her, and mutely seemed to ask why they were parted. Over its bold brow they had wandered more than over any other portion of the Bay, and each rock was known to him, many by some name given by her to remind him of some happy event or excursion.

As he reined in his horse to gaze at it, he thought how important a part it had played in his young and troubled life. First in the driving shipwreck, when the brief glimpse at its lofty crest created in the doomed wretches a dawn of hope. Then as he raced along the dismal beach, his aching eyes searching for its form in the sea-mist, he remembered yet the joy with which he first beheld that stern outline.

Sweeter still was the place it filled in his life with Petrel. Later again, those gloomy recesses under the steep cliff had sheltered the fugitive whose capture might have brought him to an ignominious death. And to whom did he owe his escape from that deadly peril but to the heroic girl who dared the elements, who had risked her life and honour, for love of him? How he had repaid her devotion was told in the story of their two lives, separate now and unhappy. O that he could but have forgotten his accursed pride of name and race, and flung the rich bribe of the old estate with all its honours aside, taking her in its stead who was worth more than all the world to him! Thinking over all that these had cost



Hindmarsh River:  
Victor Harbour:



Mouth of Inman River:  
Seal Rock in the Distance.

PHOTO: S. A. GOVT.

PHOTO: A. BLISS



him, it now seemed impossible that he should ever care to enter the home of his ancestors.

‘It is the price of her happiness,’ he murmured, ‘and mine. I can never look upon it without shame and remorse.’

He was now going to the woman to whose triumphant schemes he had surrendered himself. Should he tell her that her plotting had all been in vain, that she might look for another heir, for he would take neither lands nor title? Why had he not taken that stand at first, his ultimatum being—‘Either with Petrel or not at all’?

Possibly his aunt’s love might have triumphed over her pride, and he might have gained both his bride and the estate. In truth, it was what he ought, in justice and honour to the girl to whom he was so deeply indebted, to have done; but the opportunity had passed; and, having lost so much, must he now lose all by flinging his uncle’s proffered gift in his aunt’s face? No, there was yet a chance of avenging himself upon his enemies, and above all on Miss Grantley, by inducing Petrel to elope with him, and installing her as his mistress in Grantley Hall.

‘How I should triumph over my aunt’s machinations and pride in saying, “You prevented her coming here as my wife, but in spite of you she has come; how do you like the alternative?” It would be a bitter insult to the proud spirit of my female relative, and therefore the sweeter salve to my revengeful feelings.’

But to accomplish these purposes it was necessary that Sir Archibald should first throw off this mortal coil at an early date, or the chance of obtaining Petrel would be lost. ‘I must sound the old lady as to my prospects of becoming a magnate of the glorious land whose motto ought to be, “Grasp, rightfully if you can, but above all grasp,” never doubting that, when she annexes a territory, it is in the interests of mankind at large, posterity in general, and the aboriginal inhabitants in particular. Away with dull care! And now for my beloved aunt.’

## CHAPTER XXXIX

## ROLAND SURPRISES HIS AUNT

MISS GRANTLEY was expecting her nephew, and greeted him with much cordiality and some real feeling. The fate of Joan had softened her, and, as she spoke of the painful subject, the usually cold face worked, and presently she quite broke down.

‘Ah, Roland, I wish you could have been here ; you surely would have found her. Now it is too late, and we shall never see her again !’

What could he answer ? It was simply a repetition of the reproach he had already addressed to himself and that Maria had uttered.

‘I expect others did all that I should have been capable of, aunt.’

‘They tried,’ she whimpered ; ‘but you have such influence with the natives and understand their language ; and either half we hear about their powers of tracking is gross exaggeration, or else you would have compelled them to find her, dead or alive.’

Then there was a pause while the lady collected herself.

‘I am convinced she was murdered,’ she presently said.

‘Good God, aunt, for what purpose ?’ he blurted out in a surprised tone ; for here, where he least expected it, was another individual to indorse the sergeant’s opinion that there had been foul play. She did not reply for a moment, but he knew what her silence meant. Then she said—

‘Oh, Roland, that one of our race should have met such a fate, and that no retribution has been exacted !’

‘Ay,’ he replied, through his set teeth, ‘the retribution is to come for the wrong, if indeed wrong has been done.’

Startled at his stern, significant tone, she pursued the subject no further.

‘Has this made any alteration in your plans ?’ he asked.



‘No, I shall stay here for some time longer in any case. Possibly my brother, when all is settled, may want to see me—and you too,’ she added.

‘How is the old boy? It’s ill waiting for dead men’s shoes, and I intend acting as though I had no expectations from my uncle.’

‘In what way?’ she inquired.

‘By leaving this neighbourhood, and indeed the colony, and taking up runs on the Darling. Larger tracts of country, of a better quality, can be obtained there, giving one more scope than is possible here.’

‘Have patience,’ she said imploringly. ‘I have not yet received a reply to my last letter. When it comes, it will doubtless contain the intelligence that Sir Archibald has appointed you his heir—one of the most enviable positions for a young man in England.’

‘I presume, then,’ he observed bitterly, ‘your last conveyed the information that I am now eligible, or, to put it plainly, that what were considered disqualifications on my part are removed.’

‘I forgive you your satire, nephew, and am sorry that you do not yet recognise what a bright future is before you waiting to be grasped. Only think: instead of the arid, desolate plains of Central Australia, a magnificent estate in one of the most picturesque counties in England; instead of toiling long years for a modest competence, which may never be attained, a large fortune in a few years, with a handsome allowance at once; and, in lieu of a solitary life among rough, rude men and savages, all the alluring pleasures of polite society, with a beautiful girl for a wife.’

‘The views, or rather the contrasts, are striking, when portrayed by the hand of the magician who has worked the change—or shall we say the miracle?’ he said scornfully; ‘but you remember the old proverb, “One man” (or woman in this case) “can take a horse to the water, but twenty can’t make him drink.” I am the unappreciative animal in question, and may decline the dainty dish set before me—even the

proffered bride, whose beauty is guaranteed by no less an authority than yourself.'

'Roland Grantley,' she exclaimed haughtily, 'I have loved you more than any other being in heaven or on earth, and have laboured to make you one of the most envied men in England. Do you think such affection and service merit nothing better than scornful jests?'

'And do you think,' he answered with equal pride, 'that I am made of the stuff that will suffer the interference of any one in guiding, moulding, or possibly warping my life and destiny? I will mould my own future, and carve out my own destiny. In a land like this there are big prizes for the bold, the energetic, the enterprising.'

She looked with admiration at the young face which had of late grown so much older, sterner, and more self-reliant, and her eyes softened.

'I will help you, Roland, in spite of yourself; and when you are the lord of Grantley Hall and a man of mark in England, it will be my pride to think I shall have had some part in it.'

'I give you fair warning,' he coldly said; 'hope nothing, expect nothing from me, lest you suffer a grievous disappointment. Stay in this district I will not—ask yourself if the associations are so pleasant as to offer any inducements; and, when I do leave, it is for years, perhaps for ever.'

'You are hard as steel,' she answered, 'and as unyielding. Mine must be a lonely life; will you do nothing to lighten it?'

'And what must mine be? and who has done most to make it what it is?' he retorted. 'I am little beyond boyhood, but woman has ceased to delight me, and I well know that I have loved my last. You perhaps scarcely realised what you were doing; but learn now that it was no mere boy-and-girl love that you strove to blight, but on my part at least the passion of a strong nature, the affection of a life. I shall never forget—or forgive. You have claimed my attachment and gratitude, and under other circumstances you

would have had a right to them ; but think what I owe to her, and then ask yourself with bitter shame how the debt has been paid by us both.'

The words seemed to rush from him in the vehemence of his passion, and in silent awe, with downcast eyes, she stood before him. For a moment he stayed for a reply, then turned and passed out into the night, his steps following the old familiar path down to the sea-beach where they used to meet. For a while he lingered there, then wandered on over the Bluff, revisiting every spot where they two had been, recalling every loving word and caress of hers, and storing them up to feed his remorse and regret upon, when far away.

'It's for the last time,' he said, half in excuse for the weakness ; 'I shall soon be far away ; let me carry with me all the memories I can, though they sting me like scorpions.'

As morning broke, he found his way back to the house, and his aunt heard him enter his room.

When he left, she had sunk into a seat in an uncontrollable burst of tears. In justice to her it must be admitted she had never dreamt of the depth of his love for Petrel, or that he would take it thus. Poor fellow, she was terribly sorry for him ; but, after all, what else could have been done ? The honour, the very existence, of the Grantley family was at stake. She feared he would feel it during his life ; but still he might marry and raise up children to perpetuate the old name, and that was the main thing. Having arrived at this conclusion after reviewing past events in the privacy of her own chamber, Aunt Arabella drew on her nightcap and placidly fell asleep, to dream that her nephew had taken possession of the hereditary estates amidst the universal rejoicings of all England, and had brought home one of the Princesses of the Blood as his bride. Then, with the surprising celerity with which things are managed in dreamland, numbers of heirs were born, she herself occupying the onerous position of head-nurse or lady-superintendent of the nursery, and in a very short time wishing that either they or she had never been born into this world of woe. The perpetuation of the

family became established beyond all question, as the prolific princess kept intrusting infant Grantleys to her care at a rate that was most embarrassing. It was in vain to expostulate with her or entreat her to relax her efforts ; she declared that, when she married, Miss Grantley had so impressed upon her the paramount duty of giving heirs to the great house she was entering, that her whole being had become imbued with the idea that it was impossible to divest herself of it. If the thing were being overdone, the responsibility rested with the lady-superintendent of the nursery. In utter despair Miss Grantley was contemplating an immediate departure to the centre of Australia—where she heard there lived a tribe of aborigines who understood the art of checking the over-production of infants—with a view to acquiring a knowledge that circumstances had rendered indispensable, when she awoke, inexpressibly relieved to find that her house was not threatened with any new evil, and that the visit into the interior might safely be deferred.

As for poor Roland, he had not slept at all, as might be expected after his self-indulgence in visiting nearly every spot that called back painful memories. Nevertheless, he met his aunt at the breakfast table with the utmost calmness, and by tacit consent no allusion was again made to the topics of the previous evening's conversation.

There were many matters connected with the Talkie property to arrange, now that it was known he intended to leave the district. Miss Grantley would continue to live on in the house, and most of the land could be sold or leased. Thus it was definitely settled that in a few months he should depart for the south-east to conclude his business there, prior to finally leaving for the Darling.

Grantley's spirits rose at the prospect of a change from the dull routine of daily duties. He was a true pioneer at this stage of his life, and languished in an atmosphere where civilisation had taken root. Brave, energetic, and enterprising, under even the happiest domestic circumstances he would have found a difficulty in subduing his desire to explore

new regions and encounter perils in pursuance of the squatter's vocation. Now, with the memory of his thwarted love fresh upon him, he was impatient to be away from every human being who knew his story. Months passed away, however, and he still remained at Talkie, much to the surprise of his aunt. She could not understand how, after that vehement burst of passion, he could reconcile himself to stay so long.

In the first place, he had heard rumours of a murder having been committed at a lonely hut in the bush about the time of the disappearance of Joan, and, not considering it wise to acquaint the police with the supposed clue, he set himself to follow it up. Eventually it became evident that, if a dark deed had been done, it was weeks prior to the loss of his sister. His interest immediately dropped, and he placed his information in the hands of Sergeant Wash.

Shortly after this a human skeleton was discovered in a remote corner of the district, only superficially covered with dust and leaves; and a report quickly spread that these were the remains of the lost girl. An examination proved, however, that they were the remains of a big man, who must have died years before. Surmise then fixed upon the lost whaler, Salter, and his fate was thought to be thus solved; but presently some astute individual bethought him that Salter had lost a finger, whereas in that respect the skeleton was intact.

Riding back from the interment of this unfortunate, in company with Sergeant Wash, Grantley said—

‘Do you not, as an experienced police-officer, consider it strange that within the radius of a few miles two persons should have been lost, leaving no signs behind—Salter and my sister?’

‘It is singular,’ replied the sergeant, ‘and points to the possibility that they got into the soft, absorbent swamps in attempting to cross, and were swallowed up.’

‘That may be the case, or partially so,’ said Roland, ‘a weak and worn-out person might easily so succumb; but how about the tracks not being found?’

'There are many ways of accounting for failure there. You know as well as I do that not all the blacks can track, apart from the fact that we often hurry them, and that they frequently become disgusted and give it up. They have also superstitions about certain places, which they therefore avoid.'

'I am aware of all that,' returned Grantley, 'but I had an object in ascertaining your views. It is this: Was there any difficulty with the natives in the search after my sister?'

'For the first days none,' said the trooper; 'but you must remember no tracks were seen away from the vicinity of the station, so that in a general search they could easily avoid any place they wished, without attracting attention.'

'Do you think, looking back after this lapse of time, that any disposition of the kind was shown by them?' Roland asked.

'I see to what your questions tend,' said the officer, 'and the same fears have occurred to me—namely, that a portion of country, however small, was not examined by the blacks; but so far as came within my observation and knowledge, no locality was omitted. As the search progressed with no prospect of success, they came to their usual conclusion, when they can't account for anything otherwise, that "Muldarpie" was at the bottom of it.'

'Was there any difference in Salter's case?'

'Decidedly; we took up his tracks without difficulty and followed them with more or less trouble for nearly two days. He appeared to have wandered in an aimless way from the time he left the native pad. The latter part of the time he doubtless suffered from *delirium tremens*, as his clothes were scattered about. Ultimately we traced him to the white stone you have heard so much of, beyond which the trackers seemed to me reluctant to proceed. Night was falling, and we deferred further work until morning, when rain unfortunately set in, and then it required smart fellows to run a man's track in that country. I thought there were traces leading into the tiers, but the blacks would not admit this.

They persistently averred that every sign ended at the stone, and that " Muldarpie " was responsible for the rest.'

' And he has never been found ? ' asked Roland.

' No,' said Wash. ' Had his tracks been lost in the swamps, I should have thought it likely he had perished in them ; as they were followed to the ranges, I believe he met his fate there.'

' And do you suppose his remains will be discovered some day ? '

' Scarcely likely,' replied the sergeant, ' as that country is swept by bush fires every two or three years.'

Roland started. ' Strange to say, I never thought of that ; the same thing applies to my poor sister's remains, and we may never know what has become of her.'

' I hardly think it does apply to her case,' said the officer dryly ; ' but, even if she does lie in the scrub, the part where she was lost is not nearly so subject to fires as the higher lands.'

' It is evident,' returned Roland, ' you still adhere to your opinion that we must look elsewhere to find the solution of the mystery.'

' I have the more reason to hold it, since your researches, conducted with consummate skill, have resulted in finding no trace of her in the bush. You told me you spent days watching where eagle-hawks alighted : I thought it a splendid idea, and one I ought to have adopted myself. What came of it ? '

' The discovery of three dead sheep and one bogged cow,' said Grantley, ' as the result of nearly four days' observation. It was gruesome work watching the great birds hovering and wheeling round and round long before they settled, and then riding up with one's heart in one's mouth, fearing the worst. The first I noticed went down at the edge of the Black Swamp, about seven or eight miles from the Creek station, in thick scrub. As I rode up to the place, two eagles and a lot of crows got up and half a dozen wild dogs slunk away. There were the remains of a sheep, and, as the stench was awful,

I did not linger a moment ; but I thought, from the marks about, what a gallant fight for life the poor brute had made.'

'And the others?' asked the officer with some interest.

'Much the same, but without so much horrid smell, which was accounted for by the fact that one had been dead longer and the other was nearly fresh. The cow was sunk nearly up to her back in mud beyond the possibility of getting her out, and, as the crows had been tearing at her, I ended her misery with a bullet, though she was not my property.'

'I won't apprehend you for that kind of cattle-duffing,' said the sergeant. 'And so your efforts ended without any other discovery?'

'Yes,' replied Grantley; 'my aerial trackers persisted in descending to the same places, and I had to give it up, with the conviction that, if there had been any more dead creatures anywhere near, I must have found them.'

'More proof still that the scrub does not hold the secret,' answered the sergeant.

## CHAPTER XL

### FRESH FIELDS AND PASTURES NEW

REFUSING to acknowledge defeat, Roland Grantley for some days longer rode over and through that broad, desolate scrub and swamp, sometimes accompanied by a black fellow or policeman, more frequently alone, knowing all the time that that of which he was in search might be within a few feet and yet be passed unseen. With stern and dogged persistency he forced his way through the densest thickets and the closest bush, yet his lost sister he never found.

Over high, rocky hills, along the margin of lakes, rivers, and swamps, under precipices and cliffs, on the level sea-beach, among the weeds and débris that were tossed in wild confusion on much of that rugged coast, he sought with indomitable perseverance. Ah! if he could but have known how near he once was to a discovery that would have set all



doubts at rest and saved the anxiety of years ! Had he been taking part in the old game which children play, he would have been told that he was ' hot, hotter, burning.' It was clearly not for him to solve the mystery of the fate of poor Joan. Proud of his bush-lore, and justly so, he mistook signs that a novice might have understood and acted upon. Weary and dispirited he said to Enfield at last—

' No man can be sure that the secret is not hidden in that thick scrub, but I am inclined to believe it is not aboveground. I can think of nothing more to be done ; we must trust now to time and chance. I shall return to the south-east next week, and hope to start for the Darling in a few months.'

' Oh, brother, why must you seek more dangers ? ' sighed poor Maria ; ' there are only two of us left now.'

' If you try to divert me from my purpose,' said he, with an assumption of gaiety, ' I'll persuade your beloved Jem to accompany me. He must be pining to traverse once more the wilderness, with all its delights, after sitting so long under his own vine and fig-tree. How long is it since you perpetrated matrimony ? It appears ages to me, but I daresay to you it has passed " like love's young dream." '

' It would have, but for this dreadful affair of Joan's loss,' she replied. ' But won't you give up this idea of going away so far ? '

' The earth, or at least this antipodean part of it, is waiting to be subdued and replenished ; I am but obeying the divine command ; though, on reflection, it seems hard on the aboriginal lords and ladies of the soil that we should use these scriptural injunctions to justify our aggressions.'

' Stuff and nonsense, Roland ! Why can't you be serious when I want to talk quietly with you ? '

' My dear, I am as serious as the Rev. Jeremiah Jiggs, who, you recollect, united you (that's the clerical phrase, I believe) to the man of your choice ; and as for quietness, I am as tame as that old nag you ride with such matronly dignity.'

' Then I wish you would be reasonable and drop your aggravating quizzical ways.'

'To be reasonable is beyond the capacity of most people, and I am no exception. As for the rest, can the ferocious leopard change his spots, or the black man his ebony hue?'

'I firmly believe any metamorphosis of the kind would be easier than to keep you to the point, when you once begin to fence a question,' irately said the usually placid Maria.

'Here cometh James; shall we defer our interesting conversation to a more convenient season?' he replied. 'I am like clay in the hands of the potter when in your society.'

She met with small assistance from her husband; he knew that Roland had quite decided on going, and that no persuasion would avail to prevent him now.

'It's the best thing he can do,' he said to her when the matter was first mooted. 'He is not hampered with a wife and contingent possibilities; in fact, the boot is on the other leg. He's not got over the wound inflicted by one of your fascinating sex; and the recognised and approved plan to effect a recovery is to retire from the haunts of men, and more particularly women, to some place where there is something to kill. Big game is best; I suppose black fellows may be included in the category.'

'And very possibly get killed himself,' said Maria; 'but it's no use talking to you men.'

She made one more attempt by pointing out that there was every probability of Roland being appointed Sir Archibald's heir.

'Why can't he wait and see before he risks his life in that awful country and climate? Aunt is dreadfully cut up about his going.'

'It's no use, my dear,' said Enfield; 'I have talked seriously with him about that and other matters, and, whatever we may think or do, he has absolutely made up his mind and will not be turned from his purpose.'

From that time it was tacitly understood that Roland would in the course of three or four months leave for New South Wales, and that no further opposition was to be offered by his relatives.

There were several more consultations with Sergeant Wash respecting the fate of his sister, but that zealous if somewhat self-opinionated officer evidently needed no spurring on if any clue became known.

‘I’ve my own theory, Mr. Grantley, as you know,’ he said ; ‘but that won’t prevent my following any trace, wherever it leads me.’

At length all was settled, and, scarcely expecting to see Encounter Bay again, or at any rate not for years, Roland found himself on the track for the south-east. The journey was monotonous, nothing transpiring to distract his gloomy thoughts from the late depressing events, until he approached the upper end of the Coorong. In the evening he was leaving the beach to camp, when he suddenly came upon a number of blacks. There was little surprise or alarm in this, as the tribe had long been perfectly quiet, and he frequently met them on his trips. But on this occasion there were signs of uneasiness, and he noticed a tall, grizzled savage sink back and cover himself with an opossum rug. As he did so, Grantley caught the glint of a shining object, like a brass token, on his breast. Surely, too, there was a deep scar across the brow and cheekbone. Occupied with his own troubled reflections, this at the time did not make much impression upon him ; and when a few words had passed with one or two who knew him well, he rode on.

It was when camped that night that it came upon him like an inspiration that the man who shrank from observation was no other than the warrior who took so prominent a part in the massacre of the shipwrecked party, and the same desperado who, in defiance of Major Cuthbert’s armed troopers, escaped in the Coorong. He felt half inclined to ride back and ascertain what the bright thing was that hung from his neck. It might be some memento of his unfortunate shipmates, but it was not to be supposed, if this were really the savage he took him to be, that he would be surprised a second time, or submit quietly to a single opponent.

‘Should a similar chance offer, I shall be on my guard,

and, if he is the ruffian I think, he shall show what his ornament is,' he decided; and so Roland Grantley missed an opportunity of learning a secret.

As he rode on the next morning, he at first quite casually noticed a tall gum tree with a straight trunk, so much finer than others near that he could not help observing it, and even rode up to examine it more closely. As he did so, an eaglehawk flew off a broken limb, and an opossum it had dragged from a hole and killed fell to the ground.

'A poor little black ring-tail,' he said; 'and by the fur hanging to the end of the broken bough, that is where he was caught. A good tree for posts, and, if nearer the station, it would not stand long. What a pretty peep at the sea between those sandhills!'

Years after these trifling incidents were to be recalled to his recollection in a peculiar manner.

That evening he reached the station, and found Floss Gifford, who was evidently glad to see him.

'The place is dull when a fellow is all alone. Scarcely a soul has been here since I came, except two of the Lawns and two or three other fellows,' said he.

'Not a bad average of visitors,' replied Roland, 'for this out-of-the-way locality; I've been longer here and not seen a soul.'

It was obvious that Floss felt nervous and excited, no doubt still thinking of the unaccountable fate of his lost love, though he never alluded to the subject, probably knowing that, if there were anything new to communicate, he would be informed. During the next day Grantley told him of his intention to start for the Darling, as soon as arrangements could be completed.

'I shall send about five thousand ewes from Talkie and here in a few weeks, and follow them up myself later. I have spoken to Enfield about your buying this run from me. It will work in well with your place and form a fine compact property.'

'Why do you want to clear out, Roland? It seems to me,

as well as others, that this is a coming part of the colony. The climate is splendid ; droughts only slight, so that losses are small ; and the black difficulty, no small one, as we are aware from past experience, is over.'

'I've weighed it all,' answered the other, 'and may tell you at once it is no use arguing—I'm off. I quite agree that this portion of the colony will progress ; it is well situated between Adelaide and Melbourne. All the more inducement to you and Enfield to accept my offer, while I am in the humour. I am quite cognisant of the many difficulties connected with taking up country where I intend going ; but the New South Wales Government are liberal in their conditions.'

'I presume you have counted the risks,' said Floss. 'Here the niggers were bad enough, and worse on the Murray ; but I'm told the Darling fellows are infinitely worse still.'

'Possibly ; but the ruling powers of Sydney leave us pretty much to settle our own little differences with them, and, as the whole of the river frontage is being rapidly taken up, there will be plenty of strength to cope effectually with the noble savage. Think over my proposal, and write to Enfield ; if you don't buy, some one else will. I am in a roving mood, and the centre of the continent presents the most attractions just now.'

'You are a good-plucked one, and deserve success. For myself, I'd rather live on the smell of a greased rag here than make millions in a climate like that.'

'But I am not going with the expectation of accumulating millions. A considerably less amount will do. As to the greased rag, I'm much more likely to have to subsist on that meagre nourishment there than here.'

'Well,' rejoined Gifford, puffing a long whiff of smoke, 'as my reasoning powers, never great, are completely exhausted, I am going to try another tack. We know each other sufficiently to take liberties ; I'll act the part of the candid friend and say that you are a d——d fool ; how does that strike you ?'

'It's very conclusive, and unfortunately too true to admit of argument, much less denial,' was the cool rejoinder.

'To throw away such chances as you have here, not to mention the probabilities your aunt is interesting herself about in the old world—why, man, it's exasperating; you ought to be shut up as incapable of managing your own affairs.'

Roland smiled. 'Calm yourself; fools and lunatics make very good stepping-stones occasionally for wise men to mount to fortune. Accept your opportunity and be thankful.'

'Thankful, because I shall benefit by a fellow I esteem behaving like an ass? Not at all; but, if go you will and go you must, if this mad fit really is so hot, of course we will buy the station, though I shall never have done anything with such reluctance in my life.'

'Then we may consider that settled,' replied Grantley; 'now let us turn in. To-morrow we will go round by the stone hut and the blackwood lagoon flocks; I long for a ride on the Star.'

For several weeks the young men were busily engaged in the multifarious occupations of station life, and insensibly both grew more cheerful under the beneficial effects of constant employment.

'Mail to-night,' observed Grantley, as they were approaching the homestead late one evening. 'I expect to hear my tender for a thousand miles of country on the Upper Darling has been accepted.'

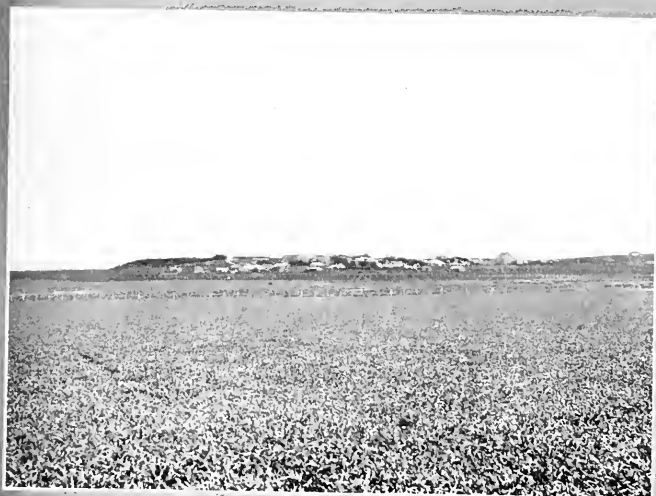
'Please God it hasn't,' replied Floss. 'I hope you will receive better news than that.'

'Starting again, old man?' asked Roland.

'Yes, I'm working up; the life has been so pleasant since you came that I'm not such a blockhead as to wish it ended. If I get at the bag first and there is an official letter in it, fire and flame are its fate.'

Sure enough there was a huge envelope from the Crown Lands Office in Sydney, and its contents informed Roland Grantley, Esq., that his application for blocks Myall 1, 2, 3,

THE N°B  
PORT ELLIST



PORT  
ELLIST





and a lot more, had been duly granted, subject to conditions specified.

‘Bravo!’ said he.

‘Blast it!’ echoed Floss. ‘Hang the mail! let us have supper first; over a pipe I may be able with a show of equanimity to endure such reverses and disappointments.’ While the meal was proceeding, a letter in a girl’s hand caught Roland’s eye. He took it up and read:

‘DEAR MR. GRANTLEY,—Mr. Cleeve is much worse since you left, and Petrel has been sent for. I promised to write if anything happened.—Yours truly,  
LIZZIE.’

The light died out of his face, giving place to the habitual gloom, and he rose from the table and went out. For the last few months he had struggled to accept the position and acknowledge that their lives were finally separated, and now Petrel was thrown once more within his reach. He had but to ride to Encounter Bay to be with her. True, she might refuse to see him, but there were means of meeting without asking her consent. A short time more and he would have been far on his expedition into the interior; and now came this fresh temptation. Though the old irrepressible longing to behold her again face to face took strong hold of him, he still scarcely knew if he were glad or sorry to learn she was soon to be so near.

## CHAPTER XLI

### THE HEADMAN SAILS INTO THE UNKNOWN SEA

FOR days succeeding the receipt of the note by Grantley from his correspondent at Encounter Bay recorded in the last chapter, Gifford had little reason to congratulate himself upon the pleasure of his companion’s society. At last he appeared to shake off his taciturnity. The truth was, he had been struggling against the impulse to mount his horse and ride to meet his lost love. The temptation was almost over-

powering, but his better nature triumphed. He thought of the dying father and his past generosity and kindness to the friendless boy. With a great oath he swore she should be sacred to him while under his benefactor's roof.

'I'll push on my departure for the Darling,' he said, 'and not embitter his last days even by my presence.'

After this resolution had been arrived at, the relations between the friends resumed much of their late animation; and though Floss, half in earnest, still protested against the other's purpose, he none the less assiduously assisted him in making the necessary preparations.

'Mail-night again; how quickly it comes round!' thought Gifford. 'I trust there will be no more letters, official or otherwise, particularly otherwise, for him. God knows I have found it hard enough to bear my own heavy load of grief with some degree of firmness and cheerfulness, even when he has been in his brightest mood.'

He opened the bag, and his hopes were dispelled. There was a neat little envelope addressed in Petrel's pretty round hand to Roland. He remembered the writing well, as he had often seen it when he first knew her, and had always admired the plain, clear uniformity of the letters.

Grantley now entered, and with his quick glance immediately saw the note and recognised the hand. Taking it up, he left the room, and Gifford saw him no more that night, but he heard him pacing about outside for hours.

The letter ran thus:

'MY DEAR ROLAND,—Father desires me to write that he wishes to see you before he dies. The doctor says he cannot live more than a fortnight or three weeks.

'Please come at once to see him.—Yours affectionately, PETREL.'

Could Roland Grantley have found the Star or any other good horse, he would have been on the road for Encounter Bay within an hour. But they were all turned out at large long ago, and the night was too dark to hope to find them.

The request of his old and dying friend was amply suffi-

cient in itself ; but backed by her the summons was imperative and sacred as the command of a queen to her slave. How vividly now came back to his recollection all the grand old Headman had done for him ! His had been no niggard hand ; life, food, lodging, protection had all been bestowed upon the friendless, unknown fugitive ; without one word or thought of mistrust, he had been given a place in his own family and treated as one of its members. His own beloved daughter was shown no greater kindness or generosity.

It was to this noble, self-reliant man that he was indebted for the training that had fitted him for his pioneer life ; he had taught him to ride, row, swim, and use tools as well as most workmen. Summing it all up, what did he not owe to the friend now on the point of death, who asked to see him once more before the end came which he had so often bravely faced in his dangerous avocation ? More than all these, the young man, with softened feelings, now recalled the perfect trust reposed in him on all occasions. Petrel herself had been intrusted to him with a perfect confidence that never knew one tinge of doubt ; and, when there was none other to hide and assist the escape of his accomplice, on whom his honour and life depended, she was encouraged to dare every risk for his sake.

All night long his thoughts ran on the past, the days which seemed so far separated from his present life. He had ordered that the horses should be brought up at daylight, and as the first flush of light brightened the east he stood by Gifford's bed.

' Floss, last night Petrel wrote me that her father is dying and wishes to see me. I have sent for the Star and shall start directly he is saddled.'

' Quite right, old man,' said Gifford ; ' you can do no less for that splendid fellow ;' and up jumped the sleeper, and before the mob came galloping to the yard, the Star only half extended, with broad expanding nostril and flashing eyes, at their head, a good breakfast lay ready for Roland and he was made to partake of it.

His provident friend had also carefully prepared sufficient provisions for the journey, and saw that the necessaries for camping-out were strapped on the saddle. More than that, he got a horse for himself and accompanied the traveller some miles on the road, to allow him the opportunity of giving last instructions.

This done, they parted, and Grantley was left alone to continue his rapid ride on his good steed. Late in the night of the second day he drew rein at the Fishery cottage, and met Petrel at the door. It was certainly she, but where was the bright young face of old, with its lustrous dark eyes? All the light was gone out of it; her face was sad and worn with sleeplessness and the eyes dull with much weeping. She gave him a warm grasp of the hand, but was powerless to say a word. Then came auntie, and from her he learned that the Headman was much worse than when Petrel wrote, and was longing to see him. Presently a voice from an inner room called out, though it was so weak and changed that Grantley scarcely recognised it—

‘Is that Rolly? I thought I heard the Star on the beach.’

Without a word to the women the young squatter passed in, and sank in uncontrollable emotion by the bedside of the man to whom he owed more than to any other on God’s earth.

The Headman clasped his hand with something of the old firm grasp.

‘My brave boy,’ he said, ‘I knew you would come to say good-bye, however far you were away, but I feared you might not be in time.’

Then there was silence again, broken by the dying man saying at length in almost cheerful tones—

‘Don’t fret, Rolly; I’ve been a useless, battered old hulk long enough, and have looked death in the face too often to flinch now. But we won’t talk of that; I want to tell you why I was sent out here a convict from England.’

Roland raised his head.

‘I know the story, and am aware that you committed no crime, and that your sentence was unjust.’

‘God bless you, my boy, for saying so! But how did you hear? Was it from Pet?’

‘No, from your old friend, Mr. Grote; he wrote my aunt all about it, and did you full justice.’

‘It was like him. But for that man, I might have become as bad as the worst of those with whom I was thrown. He got me assigned to him, and trusted me from the beginning, treating me with a kindness and consideration I have never forgotten. When my time was up, he helped me by a loan of money, and later recommended me for employment here. Long before this he had, by correspondence with his agents in the old country, learned the truth of my statements concerning my arrest and trial. But what could he do against such evidence? I was found with a hare in my possession, and, in my passion at being falsely accused by my enemy, I knocked him down, maiming him for life. God knows what I have suffered for that blow, for that single moment’s forgetfulness of my strength. Never since that day have I struck any man, however great the provocation. Only a month ago a letter reached me from Mr. Grote with the intelligence that my accuser on his death-bed stated that he had wronged me, for he knew all along I had saved the hare from his dog, and that he was actuated by revenge against me. It comes rather late after thirty years, when I have only a day or two to live—too late for any reversal of the sentence to benefit me, even if it could be obtained, which is not likely now. Forgive me, my boy, for dwelling on all this, but I could not die happy without telling you the whole truth. There is little more to say. I have endeavoured to bear my lot with fortitude and patience, and for the sake of Pet alone should have done so. No human being can charge David Cleeve with having wronged him, and, though a convict, I can look my fellow-creatures in the face and call God to witness that I am an honest man. I am tired now, and so must you be after your long journey.’

Roland took the great hands in his.

‘My more than father,’ he said in a broken voice, ‘I believe every word you say, and of all the men I ever met you are the

best and noblest. You have risen superior to the dark fate forced upon you, and I, who owe you everything, can never sufficiently thank you, can never express half the admiration I feel for you.'

A great, glad light shone in the pain-stricken face.

'Hush, my son—though I thank you for the words. Go now; another day—I think I have one more to live—I must speak to you about Petrel.'

With bowed head the young man passed out of the room as auntie went in.

'Tell Petrel,' she said, 'I will attend to him for a while; she wants to speak to you.'

'Forgive me, auntie,' he whispered, as he stooped and kissed her.

She knew that he was thinking of his conduct to her niece, and answered, pointing to the sick-chamber—

'If he can, who else dare refuse?'

He found Petrel with his horse; she had watered and fed him, and now stood fondling his noble head with gentle hands, while he bent towards her in mute appreciation.

'He knows me as well as ever,' she said, as her tears dropped fast on the silky mane.

Pale, worn, and grief-stricken, she scarcely bore any resemblance to the bright, joyous girl of but a year ago. An hour since, and his impulse would have been to take her in his arms to comfort her, had he seen her thus before going in to the sick man; but the dying father's trust had indeed fixed a gulf between them.

'Petrel, I am going now, and shall come back again to-night. Can I help you in any way?'

'Is there no hope,' she asked, in such a pleading, desponding tone that he saw she knew the worst. 'Can nothing be done? You will return soon and stay with him; he has so longed for your coming. O Rolly,' with a frantic burst of weeping, 'what will my life be when he is gone?'

What could he say? Without a word he led the Star out of the shed, feeling such a load of sorrow and remorse as

surely few men have experienced. Then he turned to her, and in a broken voice, each tone of which she remembered to her dying day, he said—

‘Everything I have in the world—every tie, every hope, life itself, my soul, my honour—I would give for the right to comfort you.’

Slowly he mounted his horse, slowly he rode away, and she, half frightened by the deep intensity of his words, still felt some of the comfort he knew not how to bestow. She must indeed have been more or less than woman if she had experienced no thrill at the suppressed passion that vibrated in his accents.

Later that night they met again, with recovered calmness, by the bedside of the Headman, who, much exhausted by his long conversation with Roland, had slept soundly since. It was, however, plain that the end was approaching. Occasionally he spoke, but apparently was quite content to know that the two he loved so well were with him. As the night advanced, he told Petrel to go and lie down for a little, as he wanted to talk to Roland alone. Then in a whisper so low that Grantley had to bend close to hear him—

‘You must not think badly of me because Pet was parted from you. As soon as I heard that you could not inherit the family estate unless separated from her, I knew it must be so. My little girl would not have been happy if she had cost you so much. I never felt the cruel wrong done me half so deeply as when I realised that the stain on my name was a bar to her becoming your wife.’

‘I don’t deserve that you should speak to me so ; I have behaved like a cur. I ought to have cast the conditions to the winds and replied that I was bound to you and Petrel by all the ties of love and honour. I am fitly punished.’

‘My poor boy, I wish it could have been otherwise ; but she is a wife now, and you must learn to forget her. Now call her back.’

Holding a hand of each, he dozed, a great change coming over him, which made it evident to the watchers that the end

was near. Thus an hour passed, and then he motioned to Roland to raise him, so that he could look through the window. Daylight was breaking, the hour at which he had been accustomed to start in pursuit of the great sea-game. An eager expression, almost of joy, came into his pallid face. Who shall say if he was thinking of the old whaling days, or of the unknown ocean on which he was about to launch?

'It is time to go, Rolly,' he murmured; 'you will try to forget Pet?'

'I cannot; but she will be sacred to me,' was the whispered answer.

'That is right; I will carry the promise with me,' they both heard him say.

There was a moment's pause, and then he gazed fixedly out of the open casement over the sea.

'There she spouts; give way, men!' and with feeble hand he motioned as if he were bending his weight to the stern-oar at each stroke. Then came in a tone of command—

'Make fast!'

After this he appeared to be unconscious but suffering no pain. Suddenly in clear, abrupt tones came the words—

'Back-water; it's the death flurry—Steady!'

The massive jaw fell, and the closed eyes opened with no light of life in them. Roland laid him gently down and with reverent hand closed his eyelids. And so died David Cleeve, headman and convict. Honester, kinder, juster spirit never animated a noble form. 'An old lag,' 'a Van Diemenian,' he was a living reproach to the arbitrary, unjust, and iniquitous laws of his country, that, to the scandal of humanity, condemned the man who was innocent of any real offence to lifelong infamy. He was one of the noble few who rise superior to temptation and every adverse circumstance; the purity of whose nature evil cannot cling to or contaminate; who do right for right's sake. One of the oldest pioneers of South Australia, unacknowledged and unhonoured he passed away, though an honour to the country of his birth and the colony of his adoption.



They carried him to his grave in the chapel-yard and laid him to rest with all the primitive simplicity of those early days. The mourners were not many, but included nearly all those who lived within a wide radius around. The majority were of the aboriginal race, whose numbers were already rapidly diminishing as European civilisation extended, but who had always found in him a kindly sympathiser and protector. Some of these, fine, strong, young men, had in later years been members of his boat's crew. There, too, were Big Solomon, that son of Anak, and Big Tom, his two lubras standing a little aside, as was only fitting where men assembled. They came to see the 'big white man' put in the ground after the manner of his people; later they would raise their own wild lament in his honour. With grave, sad faces they stood apart, possibly instinctively feeling that, until the day when the black people finally disappeared from the broad Australian continent, they would never know a truer friend.

It is over, and all except Roland and Petrel have gone.

'Shall I say farewell for ever now,' he asked, 'and return your letters by another hand?'

'No,' she replied quietly; 'meet me here to-night for the last time, and bring them yourself.' Then she went.

'Better so,' he thought; 'let us part at her father's grave; there at least I cannot forget the promise I have made.'

Some hours later, when he returned, she was already there, kneeling by the side of the freshly piled-up earth. She rose as he approached, and he saw that, though she had been weeping, she was now composed. Ah, how fragile and pale she looked in the moonlight, and how passing fair! Surely few among the daughters of men were so lovely; nay, it appeared to him that her beauty was rather like that which an angel might wear. As she did not speak, he said—

'At your request I have brought everything you ever gave me, your letters, your portrait, and the lock of hair.'

Silently she took them and began idly pulling the framework of the daguerreotype to pieces.

'Petrel,' he pleaded, 'give it back to me. I am going far

away, probably never more to see your face. Let me look at it on that plate ; it will be some consolation to a man who will need it.'

'It is useless,' she murmured ; 'better destroy all that recalls the past.'

'Oh no ; remember my lonely life—let me carry some memento with me.'

She still hesitated.

'Trust me, you shall never repent it,' he whispered ; 'do not refuse my last request.'

She placed it in his hands.

'You shall have your wish ; I trust you, Roland Grantley, as I used to trust you when we were boy and girl together. Go, now ; I shall watch your career, for though you are no longer my lover, you are my hero always. It is well to be a man ; to grapple with the difficulties and dangers of the wilderness, and thus pave the way for those who are to come after, stifling the cravings of the heart with noble needs. Farewell. Do not follow me again. We part for ever over this grave.'

They clasped hands with a last long look into each other's eyes—then turned away.

END OF PART I

## PART II

### IN THE INTERIOR

#### CHAPTER I

##### ON THE DARLING

It is about midwinter in the year 185-, and the scene of our story changes to the banks of the river Darling, between three and four hundred miles above its junction with the mighty Murray. The time is evening, and the most remarkable object, or rather objects, to be seen at the first glance are two immense moving clouds of red dust. These are thick, impenetrable, constantly shifting masses, but what causes them the observer is at a loss to understand, unless he be one of the initiated.

If he approach the phenomenon closer, however, or if the light breeze strengthens for a moment, he will be able to see innumerable small feet rapidly stirring in and under the lower edge of the dust-demon, and then it will dawn upon his comprehension that in that column of circling earth-particles a flock of sheep are, in shepherd's parlance, 'drawing-up' to the yard.

Some distance behind, outside the darkness that can be felt, but still in an impalpable floating powder of his original element, rides a man on a dark-coloured horse with a gleaming white star in the centre of his broad forehead, talking to the individual who evidently has the flock before them in his charge.

The shepherd, Neill Monaghan, we have never yet met. He is a tall man, with long, shambling limbs, dressed in clothes

of greater diversity of cut than Joseph's celebrated coat had of colour. His features are as irregular as his garments, but withal express the utmost good-humour and good-nature.

There is no mistaking the rider or his steed. They are respectively Roland Grantley and the Star, both a little more fine-drawn than when we last saw them, but each animated by the same dauntless spirit, as evidenced by their alert look and movement.

Presently the flocks are in their respective yards and at rest ; then the clouds of dust roll away, and an encampment can be observed on the bank of a billabong of broad, clear water. There are three or four tents, a dray, and a horse-cart, still loaded with the stores necessary for forming a new station. Not far off can be heard the bells which tell the whereabouts of the horses and bullocks.

The camp is on a considerable elevation, commanding a view of a wide expanse of country. Immediately in front, to the south, winds the Darling (the Parka of the aborigines), its course marked by the tall gum- and box-trees lining its channel.

In the distance these trees have the appearance of a dark, impervious wall, and, though far out in the back country, the merest novice in bushcraft could never mistake that winding, unbroken line. Many a poor wretch, dying of thirst, casting his despairing eyes upon it, has again taken heart and been saved. To the north roll away undulating sandhills, well grassed and clothed with box-wood, hop-bush, and an occasional beef-wood tree. Beyond these are wide plains dotted with clumps of eucalypti and bounded by another line of timber, much lower than that along the river banks, but still denoting to the practised eye that there runs a long billabong, receiving its waters in flood-time from the great stream, and restoring them to it many miles lower down, probably after filling several lakes and pools.

To the west, away over sandhills, plains, belts of timber, and the winding billabong, rises a chain of hills. As they rear themselves from a broad expanse of level land, they

deserve, as they have received, the appellation of mountains. Dark and gloomy, they run as far as sight can penetrate the clear air in a north-westerly direction, miles of their rocky crests, deep ravines, and sun-baked slopes being clothed with the sombre mulga, the acacia, which covers such a vast area of Central Australia.

In this mountain-range are numerous caves, said to be haunted by the evil genii of the river-aborigine. The spirits of the extinct 'Mullas,' the ancient foe of the ancestors of the present living savage, howl with resounding cries among these rocks from closing eve to earliest dawn. The white man may not hear them or distinguish their wailing notes from the night-bird's mournful and discordant call ; but his companion, the shrinking black boy, will cower with covered head by the camp-fire and refuse to leave its light on any pretext whatever. No ; the horses may make a stampede for home, involving a long tramp in the morning back to the head station—better that than be struck with an incurable sickness by those diabolical foes. So the clank of the hobble-chains grows fainter in the distance, unless the master rises and brings back the restless animals himself. Indeed, in the early days, it needed strong measures to induce any members of the Parkingee tribe to camp in or near these hills : and whenever sickness followed, no matter what interval had elapsed, the result plainly and conclusively proved the white man's folly and the Mullas' malice.

'What for white man big one stupid?' would be the invariable reproach.

At rare periods these broad plains are seas of water ; then the sandhills are islands, the trees on the lower lands rearing their tops above the floods. The base of the mountain range is laved by the waves, as the strong winds drive them to and fro. Weeks or months this may continue ; then the waters recede, and a luxuriant growth of grass and herbage takes their place. This lasts for but a short time, however, and then the lately consolidated soil opens in bottomless fissures. These radiate in all directions, until there seems to be not one

yard of solid earth in the great expanse of recently submerged country.

Truly it is a wonderful land. In a good season it is magnificent in its fattening qualities ; in a bad, still surprising in its carrying capacity, considering the utter barrenness of its aspect. Nature surely has here surpassed herself in the variety of vegetable food she has provided for animal life. Scarcely a bush, or plant of any kind, that is not excellent for stock. Water, of course, is abundant where the river or its affluents flow, but beyond their reach there are few permanent springs, creeks, or holes of any kind ; and, with the exception of the Darling Valley, the country is an arid, waterless waste like the principal portion of the vast interior of Australia.

It was into this country Roland Grantley had led his party and his flocks. He was not alone, as the whole of the long river-frontage was already being quickly taken up and occupied. The influx came from two directions, one stream of immigrants coming from South Australia up the Murray, the other down the stream from the Sydney side.

At first the blacks had been decidedly hostile, and, being a fine race, had tried their strength and skill in many a hotly contested struggle before they realised how useless were their spears and boomerangs against the invader's powder and ball. It was soon all over ; the white man finally took possession of the whole river-frontage, and, finding a difficulty in obtaining Europeans to herd his sheep, he placed the aboriginal in charge, and, that there might be no temptation to help himself, arranged to feed him.

Gradually a sort of tacit understanding was arrived at that each station should look after the natives belonging to that particular tract of country and keep them in good order. For years there were disturbances accompanied by considerable loss of life, but the system was effectual in its operation and soon told. Brutal excess brought about equally brutal retaliation, but among the superior class of squatters there was a strong opposition to the shooting tactics which obtained in many parts of Australia, to the lasting disgrace both of the

settlers and of the various Governments ; and these men exercised much influence.

By men of this class offences were punished by the lash, which undoubtedly proved much more efficacious in cases of theft than the rough-and-ready method of nearly indiscriminate shooting. Nor, after the country had been occupied for a short time, was much difficulty experienced in discovering the culprits. When the blacks found they were well treated and fed, and comprehended that this depended upon good behaviour, they were not averse to denounce the offender, provided his life was spared.

We left Roland Grantley superintending the folding of his sheep. He had then arrived on his future station only a few weeks, several of his neighbours having preceded him by a considerable interval. For a time the blacks kept aloof ; then by accident he met an old man and woman and invited them to the camp. Once there, their fears seemed to leave them, and, after receiving some food and trinkets, instead of departing, they signified their intention of remaining in the vicinity. Intercourse having been thus begun, nothing had transpired to check it, and others came in and immediately set to work. One brought up the horses every morning, several kept up a supply of firewood, carried water, and in a score of ways showed their eagerness to be of service.

One young fellow, who always seemed to be preparing or firing off a broad grin, was incontinently dubbed ' Jolly-boy.' He early expressed a desire to ride, and, a quiet old horse having been saddled, he straightway scrambled up on the wrong side, according to our notions and prejudices, with his face to the animal's tail. On discovering the mistake the assembled aborigines fairly shrieked with laughter ; but when he was set right by Grantley and managed to put the steed in motion without tumbling off, their admiration was extreme. Later, he went for a lengthened excursion into the back country and along the unknown part of the frontage. Two or three lessons were sufficient ; he did the rest himself, very soon becoming an expert rider. His young companions with

equal ambition seized every opportunity of distinguishing themselves, and henceforth there were more aspirants for equestrian honours than horses.

In course of time a fairly comfortable house was erected, with the usual outbuildings and yards for cattle and horses. Then lambing began, and the natives were at once utilised in congenial employment, the result proving in the highest degree satisfactory.

About this period the river was opened to navigation, and the success of Grantley's enterprise seemed assured.

His sheep rapidly increased, and improved by the assiduous attention paid them. The cattle also bred fast, as indeed the whole brute creation without exception appeared to do in this climate.

He led a lonely life, comparatively rarely seeing his neighbours, and indeed spending most of his time among the natives and his flocks. He learned the native language and gained their confidence; for, though ruling them with the utmost strictness, he not only strove to be just in settling all disputes, but protected them from the other whites. Stern and often all too severe himself, he suffered no other to molest or oppress them in any way. His word was never broken whether for good or evil, and they quickly learned that it was law. In his character there was no vacillation or weakness, and they respected him accordingly.

They recognised in him a perfect bushman, and even in the management of their bark canoes he soon became as expert as the best of them. He joined their hunting and fishing parties, rode out fearlessly with them all alone and unarmed, camping night after night in their midst and sleeping as soundly as any. Freely eating and drinking with them, he yet never relaxed his authority as their master. If he deemed it necessary, though it rarely was so, he would flog a black fellow one day and the next start with him as his sole companion for a long trip into new wilds. Like all savage races, they were quick to recognise the fearless, intrepid nature, and a strong mutual liking sprang up, which never lessened



CARRIERS  
TEAM OF  
THE FAR  
BUSH



CARRIERS  
TEAM OF  
"BACK  
COUNTRY"





while their relations continued. In course of time they shepherded nearly all the sheep, and the young men and boys did most of the stock-keeping and other riding work. Thus things went on for five years, until the increase of his flocks and herds had become so considerable that Grantley began to contemplate extending his operations by taking up more country. With this end in view, he made an exploring trip to the north-west, accompanied by a black fellow named Bobby, who was a native of that part of the district. The journey was not productive of great results. They found only one small spring, and that of little importance. No other permanent waters were seen except a group of springs of a saline nature, already in the possession of a neighbour.

It was while they were encamped near these that Bobby one night related to his master how his tribe had become so reduced in numbers.

'They were once many,' said he, 'and all the black-country between the Paroo and the Cooper belonged to them. Then a great drought set in, and the waters dried up so that none was left in the creeks. I was not born, and my father was only a very young man. As the rivers failed, the black men came in to the Pirie Springs. The weather got hotter and hotter, yet no rain fell, and at last the springs began to dry up, and day by day they became more salt and bitter. Then a sickness broke out, sparing neither the strong man nor the young child. For a time the wise men said it was the "Boree" that had smitten them, but others knew the waters had done it, and wanted to go away. But where? The Parka (Darling) was too far for the sick to travel, so they lingered on, and, when the rain at length poured down, the numerous tribe of the Pernouries had dwindled to a few individuals, not twenty in all.

'Their bones lie in that soft sandhill,' continued the sable narrator, 'and those that are left of my people will soon follow them.'

Then he broke into a wild wail of grief and lamentation for the extinction of his race.

## CHAPTER II

## ON THE QUEENSLAND BORDER

A LONGER excursion was subsequently undertaken by Grantley to the Queensland boundary, and a large tract of country secured, which was later formed into a station. At that time there were few runs occupied so far out as that part of Queensland, and the natives were numerous and hostile; nor was the treatment accorded them calculated to make them anything else. They were in the way of the squatters' flocks and herds, particularly during the dry season, when the available waters became few, and cattle, natives, and game thronged upon them. The inevitable result followed: the white man and the black came into collision—in many instances, indeed, they had done so as soon as the runs were stocked—and the wiping-out process had begun.

It may fairly be asserted that in no part of Australia has the original inhabitant been too tenderly treated by the interloper. Generally his interests have been utterly neglected by Colonial Governments, even if he has not been ruthlessly dealt with. In this particular part of the continent there was nothing of justice and little of mercy, and in a few years nearly the whole of the blacks disappeared. Indubitably the squatters were responsible for much of this, for, if not actually engaged themselves in the atrocious 'black-birding' which prevailed, they were the means in many cases of the blood-thirsty black police patrolling their runs and 'dispersing' the unfortunate savages, which, put plainly, meant nearly indiscriminate slaughter.

Tales are told of these events, far too numerous to be inserted here; but a few may be selected which are by no means the most horrible.

It must be remembered that the 'black police' were men selected principally from the remnants of coastal tribes, which were hostile to those of the interior. They were trained to arms, and, loving slaughter for slaughter's sake, were

absolutely unaffected by any feelings of humanity towards their fellow-countrymen.

It is said that once, when on patrol in the western district of Queensland, the black troopers tracked a band of natives to the brink of a water-hole. Not a sign of them could be seen, but the astute human bloodhounds fathomed the ruse practised, and asked leave of their officer to enter the water. Permission being given, they stripped themselves and, knife in hand, plunged in, and the slaughter began. The hard-pressed fugitives had hoped for escape by sinking their bodies completely beneath the surface and breathing through the floating reeds. That is the sort of deed the half-civilised and well-armed savage would revel in.

On another occasion two drovers in their travels in Queensland came upon the remains of a number of slain lying together, and around them the tracks of the horses, where they had been ridden in a circle while the shooting continued.

Of course these stories will be denied, as the general charge of inhumanity is ; but instance upon instance might be recorded, not alone of devil's work perpetrated by the black police as a body, but of individual ferocity exhibited by them and the settlers also.

This state of things had obtained some time when Roland Grantley arrived with his sheep on Purndal, as his new property was called. At first not a native was to be seen, but those he had brought from Moolahalla soon opened up communications, and in a few weeks most of the outlaws of the district were at his service. They were put on as shepherds, or in any capacity in which they could be made useful ; and right well, on the whole, did they repay the trust reposed in them.

There was, however, an old ruffian known as Baldy who never submitted to the white intruder's sway. His body was said to be riddled with bullets, mementoes of his many encounters with his European foes. On one occasion he nearly killed a squatter who surprised and made a determined attempt to capture him. A desperate struggle ensued ; but,

when almost overpowered by the strong, slippery savage, whose nakedness gave him an advantage in a hand-to-hand tussle, the white man managed to draw a revolver and put a bullet through his enemy. Then he ran, and the victor was in no condition to follow. Apparently Baldy thought little of an additional pellet in his person, as he was shortly found again committing a new depredation.

Grantley often heard of this noted freebooter having been in a native shepherd's camp during the previous night, and, feeling a great desire to meet him, made friendly overtures ; but all promises of good faith and protection were in vain. The indomitable old warrior could not be induced to acknowledge or trust a member of the race which had supplanted his own. It was, however, understood that he would not molest the people or stock on the station, and in return he had assurance of his personal safety.

About a year before Purndal was occupied, two young men from Victoria were murdered by the aborigines on the bank of the creek. As there was no white survivor, we can never know exactly what had occurred. The native version is as follows :—

The travellers had brought with them from lower down the stream a black boy as guide. On getting thus far he desired to return, as a few miles farther on was the territory of a tribe always at war with his own, and he felt very sure they would kill him on the first opportunity. The white man either did not believe or failed to understand him. At any rate, he was tied to one of them, so that he could not escape when they slept. It appears that during the day they had been in communication with some of his people, and he, doubtless, had also informed them of his position. That night, when the Victorians slumbered, the savages crept stealthily upon them, and the close of the dreadful scene can be easily imagined. The narrators further asserted that the unhappy victims had native women with them ; but, if so, this was not assigned as a motive for the murder.

The boy was taken away, and the bodies left to rot there for

many a long day. At length the deed became known, probably through the blacks themselves transmitting the news from one to another. Then came the avenger in the person of a relative of one of the murdered men, red-hot with vengeful purpose to exact the penalty of much more than 'a life for a life.' Who can blame him if in his wrath he stayed not his hand? Truly, if the manes of the dead could be appeased by blood, they ought to have been well satisfied. Strange to relate, the tribe did not appear to feel great resentment for the ample revenge. It was only in accordance with their own laws and the universal practice of the strongest; but they none the less recognised with deep awe that the vengeance of the 'Boree' was very terrible.

Excepting a few untamable savages like Baldy, the whole of the remainder were quiet enough after this. No doubt they killed an occasional lonely white tramp, just to keep their hand in, when a safe opportunity offered. Even this mild kind of revenge did not last long, however, as the settlers divided them up among themselves and made shepherds and stockmen of them, as they had done with the tribes on the Darling. They then became a thoroughly subject race, and had to abandon much of their wild life. Instead of game, they were given mutton and beef to feed upon, and in lieu of 'parper' (native grass-seed) the white men gave them flour.

It was among such tribes that Grantley had formed his stations. He had the character of being a silent, self-absorbed man, bending the best energies of his mind and body to make his new undertaking a success. At this period pastoral pursuits were beset with many difficulties and dangers, as we have seen, and the consequent failures and sufferings were numerous and great. Men of fair means invested their all in these enterprises, and after years of toil and privation found themselves left penniless. No doubt this was frequently the natural result of inexperience, and in other cases of the want of the necessary attention and application. But there were often cases where, after the expenditure of

immense capital and the waste of the energy of a life, utter ruin came at last. Fearful droughts, against which no human foresight could guard, sometimes devastated the land. Streams, never before known to fail, failed then, and hundreds of thousands of sheep and cattle perished all over the face of the country. Stations were deserted, and their late owners, burnt up by the blazing sun of that hot region, withered, wrinkled, and worn by hardship and anxiety, took their way down to more temperate districts, with the merest remnant of their possessions. Generally these reverses were well borne. They were often passed over with the remark, lightly spoken, but containing a world of plaintive meaning—

‘I would not care for the money, but I’ve lost the best years of my life; and what am I fit for now?’

Roland had seen much of bush-life with its various vicissitudes. Years of hard and lonely struggle, with the almost overwhelming difficulties attending the task of subduing the wilderness, had left their effects upon him, both mentally and physically. Coming from South Australia, he was a stranger to his neighbours, who were from the other colonies. Few knew anything respecting his earlier life. Indeed, in those roaming days men came and departed so frequently that their previous histories excited little or no curiosity.

At this time much of the back-country was still unoccupied, and many of the blacks were untamed, and retained all their old propensity to steal sheep and spear cattle, being even more than suspected of now and then putting away an unknown white fellow, when off beaten tracks. Though these deeds were talked of as occurring in remoter localities, none had come under Grantley’s notice. Indeed, whites and blacks alike knew that such lawless acts would not be tolerated in the settled districts. He ruled his men with a firm hand, and, though generally respected, he was not liked. His voice was far more frequently heard in reproof than commendation. Small omissions, of which the offender thought little or nothing until he caught the sharp eye that never overlooked or forgave them, were followed by the scathing word that



was long remembered and writhed under. It was well, too, if other punishment did not fall upon the luckless wight. Still, notwithstanding all his hardness and contempt of incompetence, perhaps for this very reason, really efficient workmen and servants preferred to live in his employ and remain many years with him, an uncommon occurrence at that time. His influence over the aborigines had grown from the first, and was now unbounded. His stern justice won their respect. His word was never broken, whether it promised a gift or a flogging, though occasions for the latter were few in consequence. In other respects the natives were well cared for, even if hard worked. Possessed of a rare energy that never appeared to tire, and a perseverance that acknowledged no obstacles as insurmountable, Roland Grantley was the very man for the position he filled. Indeed, it was when dangers and difficulties pressed thickest and seemed overwhelming that the calm face lighted up and cheery words were spoken, that at other times were so rare. He was a man who went straight to his purpose with a dauntless self-reliance which was only justified by the liberal measure of success such qualities so frequently command. To gain this end he never spared himself ; what wonder, then, if he did not spare others ? In his ruthless disregard of the feelings and opinions of those beneath his authority consisted his chief fault, since it pressed heavily, even tyrannously, upon them. Yet none could doubt his fitness for such an isolated post, far remote from society and law, where the cool judgment and the firm will were so much required. A man of limitless resources, he was never at fault, whatever the demands made upon his energy through losses by fire or flood, drought or disease.

Such was our hero after years of toil and trouble as a pioneer squatter in the vast interior of Australia. The life had ripened his natural qualities and taught him to feel a proud reliance upon his ability to surmount all obstacles ; but it had left its imprint upon the set, hard face. There, too, the deep lines had grown deeper still which were the tokens of the early sorrow that his ill-fated passion brought.

A more settled gloom and greater restlessness characterised him now, which told their tale to those who were much in his society. Men are close observers in the solitary bush, and they could not fail to note that there must be some cause for the sleepless nights and the incessant tramp to and fro for long hours together. He himself never ceased to feel how different things might have been, if, instead of the lonely, cheerless lot that fostered his harder qualities, he had seen the dear lost face smiling on him with all the softening influence of a devoted wife.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE NEW COOK

THE long dry summer was nearly over, and its close was being looked forward to, since it had lasted some eight months. Rain there had been none, and, though it was May, the sun during the middle of the day continued to pour down a heat that only a salamander or a black fellow can enjoy. Lazy, enervating weather it was, such as saps the energy of most men and makes them wonder if there be any truth in the contention that all things are for the best in the best of all possible worlds. Why are they compelled to work for a living? Surely it is a time to smoke and drink cool beverages in thick, impervious shades, to lead a lotus-eater's life, such as poets and sybarites have fancied. Ay, and not they alone; for the bushman, too, pictures to himself similar delights, and trusts, some day, to see them realised, when shearing is over and the 'clip' sold, or that mob of fat cattle tops the market, even though his Elysium may only take the form of the doubtful joys of a big spree in Melbourne or Sydney.

Roland Grantley was not, however, thinking of any of these things. The more practical domestic affairs of the homestead engrossed his attention for the moment. It is often said on a station that the cook is more bother than all the rest of the hands put together. That functionary had,

figuratively speaking, been kicking up his heels at Moolahalla, and the boss had tersely told him to come for his cheque and clear out. Who was to prepare the next meal would have to be a consideration when the necessity arose ; meantime, all that had to be done was to balance a few figures, fill in the cheque, and, when the late provider of ill-cooked viands had rolled up his swag, to hand it to him. This matter of routine was scarcely concluded, when a cart was driven up and a tall, square-shouldered man alighted and inquired if there was any employment to be obtained.

‘How many of you ?’ asked Grantley, ‘and what work are you looking for ?’

‘Myself, wife, and two children,’ was the answer. ‘I’ll do anything these hard times, and she can take cooking and housekeeping.’

‘Too many of you for my purpose,’ said Grantley ; ‘but if you camp in the bend your wife can come up later and see me about it.’

A few minutes later shouts and screams were heard from up the bank of the river, and on hastening there Roland found the cart capsized and both shafts broken ; presumably no other damage having been done. In answer to his inquiries the owner said that the horse had suddenly commenced kicking, apparently without cause, and, after throwing his wife and children out, had broken the vehicle. The woman was evidently very much alarmed, and declared that she dared not go on with the same animal again.

She was quite young, with gentle, quiet manners, which enlisted the sympathies of the squatter in spite of his assumed hardness. In her face there was a startled look that appeared almost habitual, though it might well be assigned to the accident which had just occurred.

At that period white women were rare on the Darling, and the few there were were usually of one type—weather-beaten, coarse, and rough-spoken ; but this fair creature was the direct antithesis of these. She stood by the wreck of the cart, her colour coming and going, with her children beside

her, silently appealing for the assistance of the squatter. He was not easily moved, and for years had not allowed his sympathies to influence his judgment in business matters. No woman except the dusky daughters of the soil were on his stations, there being a sort of feeling in his mind that trouble would arise if any of the sex found a footing there. But this girl—she appeared little more in years—was evidently so different from the usual type that he overcame his reluctance, and, approaching her, spoke a few kind words with a strange softening of the voice that was never there when he addressed men. He said he would see what could be done to help them ; meanwhile, she must go to the house and get what she required for herself and the children.

Her pretty, timid face flushed with pleasure, and in a voice low and sweet she thanked him. There was a charm in its diffidence and shyness for a man who had, for so many years, beheld none but the roughest specimens of womanhood.

The next day the husband borrowed some tools to repair his cart. This took longer than anticipated, causing several days' delay, during which Grantley employed the woman in sewing and a few other feminine matters connected with the domestic arrangements of the bachelor establishment, which sadly required attention. These she did so well, and her manners were so modest and nice, that the owner decided to install her as cook and housekeeper, and the man as general station-hand. They were delighted to accept the situation, and in a few days Bert Darly and his wife were comfortably settled among the employés of Moolahalla.

A very short time sufficed for the neat, active little woman to effect a marked improvement in the interior of the house ; and great was the self-gratulation of the owner at having discharged ' that brute of a man-cook ' who, with possibly the best intentions, had starved, disgusted, and well-nigh poisoned him. The housekeeper's awe of her master never appeared to decrease ; she scarcely spoke, unless absolutely compelled to do so about household matters, and then she expressed herself as shortly as possible. Her deft ways and

the perfect knowledge she displayed of her duties rendered interference on his part unnecessary. This Grantley soon saw, and, with a relief that only the head of such an establishment in remote districts can know, left domestic affairs entirely under her control. For weeks not twenty words passed between them. To him there seemed no occasion for orders or directions, and he had become so taciturn that he never spoke without a purpose ; but on the rare occasions when he did speak to her his voice grew gentle. He read a piteous story in her quiet, timid manner and frightened eyes that none other saw. Once only was his tone harsh and stern. He had amply supplied a poor tramp and his wife with provisions out of the store, and later saw her hand them bread and meat. But when the sharp reproof came for giving what was her employer's and not her own, the softened eyes told that, as man, he approved her womanly kindness though, as manager, he condemned it.

Months passed on, and the Darlys gave their employer complete satisfaction. With every one else Mrs. Darly was a great favourite. Ever ready to render any assistance in sickness, or in the thousand ways a true woman can, she gained the respect and esteem of the rough bushmen. Of them all, none guessed the secret that must have gnawed at the heart of the gentle woman, and caused the hunted look and start, almost of terror, she involuntarily gave if unexpectedly approached.

Shearing had now begun—the period when, above all others, activity prevails on a bush-station, and the manager is considered a greater tyrant than ever.

One evening, the long, arduous day's work being over, the master was just sitting down to supper when a knock was heard at the door. On Grantley opening it, the visitor asked for a few moments' private conversation, and immediately led the way out into the darkness. Roland took his hat and followed in silence.

In the gleam of light through the opened door, he had seen a man of about middle height, with the drooping shoulders

that detract so much from manliness of appearance, if not from strength. His dress was that of a common 'swagman.' He wore dirty moleskin trousers and a blue serge shirt, with a belt round his waist in which was stuck a tomahawk or small axe—not an unusual thing with men of his class.

Bright, quick, restless eyes lighted up a dark and evil-looking face. Heavy black locks fell down over his neck and hung about his sallow cheeks, giving a wild look to the brutal, half-insane countenance. His nose was thin and hooked, and his mouth large and straight, with thin, cruel lips that showed a few fangs of teeth beneath. The chin was pointed and scantily covered with a bristly beard, every hair of which appeared at variance with its fellow. Altogether, unless grossly maligned by his appearance, he bore the unmistakable stamp of loafer and villain.

His first words were—

'Have you a couple in your employ named Darly?'

'Yes; and what business is that of yours?'

'That woman is my wife,' came slowly from the hard mouth.

'Do you know what you are saying?' retorted Grantley, 'or are you mad?'

'Not mad at all, sir! She ran away from me three years ago. I suppose you thought her Darly's wife?'

'Of course I did. Who was she before you married her, and where is she from?'

'Her parents are named Haxter, and live three hundred miles from here on Tilbinnie station,' said the stranger.

'What is your name? and what do you want me to do?'

'I am called Cowler, and I want you to arrange for me to see my wife alone.'

'Why alone? Though perhaps your request is reasonable enough.'

'Because Darly has sworn to murder me if I go near her, and I neither wish to be killed nor crippled. He is a far stronger man than I am.'

A contemptuous smile passed across the face of the squatter as he replied—

‘ You must be a coward, or you would dare greater dangers than that to see your wife. But what is your purpose in seeking this interview ? ’

‘ Simply to induce her to return home with me. ’

‘ Do you think there is any probability of that ? ’

‘ I do ; but, if she doesn’t come, I want my child. I have a right to him at least. ’

‘ Doubtless, in the eyes of the law ; but what can you do with a mere baby not able to walk ten miles ? ’

‘ I will manage with him somehow, ’ said the man sullenly.

‘ Where were you when your wife left your house ? ’ asked Roland, still suspicious.

‘ Away, looking for work ; and on returning I found she had been gone a month. Since then I have been wandering about searching for her. ’

‘ How far your tale is true, I cannot tell, ’ answered Grantley ; ‘ it seems reasonable that you should have an opportunity of persuading her to go back to you ; but in any case I will allow no violence, you understand ? ’

‘ I do ; and promise neither to alarm nor injure her by word or deed. ’

‘ That will do, ’ returned the other in a milder tone than he had yet used. ‘ Now, go and camp in the bend of the river out of the way, and come up in the morning at nine o’clock, when all the men will be at the shearing-shed. Then you shall see your wife. You have food ? ’

‘ Yes, thank you ’ ; and the visitor moved off in the direction indicated.

Roland Grantley went to bed that night an angry man. He felt he had been deceived, if there were any truth in the story of that black-visaged stranger, which he little doubted. His old misgivings now assumed a definite shape, a conviction that the past he had dimly seen written in her troubled face would be revealed. Not that he yet believed that she was not more sinned against than sinning ; but she and Bert

Darly had misrepresented themselves, and so entered his service under false colours. He well knew, and so doubtless did they, that he would never have employed them if he had known they were not husband and wife. He could have excused their keeping their secret until engaged and appreciated, since divulging it would have prevented most masters from employing them ; but later on they might have trusted him with the truth. It was the continued deception that annoyed him. He was vexed, too, that his estimate of the woman's goodness and virtue proved so miserably mistaken. How dare she look so meek and pure with that black shadow hanging over her daily life ? He would have no mercy ; she should face her accuser without one word of warning, and with no time allowed to weave a subtle tale to cover her sin. The truth should be known in all its nakedness, and the mask stripped from the living lie that had been under his roof for months past. Obviously yon scowling cur he had met out there in the gloaming was no dainty husband ; but were men's hearts croquet-balls to be played with at a woman's caprice ?

Such thoughts were perhaps natural under the circumstances, but were by no means fair. He, in his indignation and disappointment, was arrogating to himself the right to judge and to condemn without hearing the evidence for the defence. This, however, he had to learn ; and he was yet to regret that he had suffered his faith in the woman's superiority in all the gentler, purer attributes to falter at the first breath of slander, and so had given an opportunity to an evil man and worse husband to wreak his vengeance.

## CHAPTER IV

### A MURDEROUS OUTRAGE

THE next morning broke bright and beautiful, as nearly every opening day is during the earlier winter months in this favoured southern land, which then enjoys a climate in which a sybarite



might love to idle his life away, so calm is the cloudless sky, so clear and balmy the air.

Roland was careful to be back at the house from his duties at the shearing-shed by eight o'clock. He there found his overseer, Edgar Peerton, who had unexpectedly come in from an out-station. With the exception of a little black girl, Miola, of whom we shall hear more later, there was no one else about.

He had just time to mention to Peerton that he expected a scene, when Cowler approached. Grantley then went towards the kitchen in advance of him, and, looking in at the open door, said—

‘Mrs. Darly, is this your husband, or is he a liar?’

She quivered and shook as he uttered the words in a cold, hard tone, and there came into her eyes the wild, bewildered look of the hunted animal, which never afterwards seemed to leave them. She gave one glance at the set face of her master and judge, and, seeing no pity there, shrank back into a corner of the room, covered her blanched face with her trembling hands, and faltered out—

‘Yes, he is my husband. Oh! what shall I do? what shall I do?’

There was something so imploring and piteous in the gesture and voice, that Grantley’s heart smote him, and he gently answered:

‘Do not be frightened—no one shall hurt you; but as this man says he believes you will return to him, I have thought it only right he should have the chance of seeing you and hearing your reply.’

Her face rose from her hands with repugnance in every line of it.

‘Never! Never again! I loathe him, loathe him more than any living thing, or death itself. Mr. Grantley, you can never know half what I have suffered from that wretch, or you would have pity.’

The husband had stood silent until now, when a fierce gleam shot from his dark eyes as he retorted in a sullen tone—

‘Civil words, mistress, if you please. I can make you go if I like.’

‘Oh, no! no!’ she wailed, ‘not alive, at any rate. O that my mother had been in her grave before she made me marry you, and I with her! I will throw myself and the children into the river rather than go one step with you, for you are not a man but a devil, sunk in the lowest depths of self-degradation.’

Her aspect grew sublime. Her form rose erect as passion mastered fear and she denounced him; while fury gathered over his swarthy features, and the cruel lips drew tighter as he snarled out—

‘It is a lie; you married me of your own free will. But since you are such a vixen, stay with Darly and be his plaything until he grows tired and beats you, as he surely will. Only I must have my boy.’

The child was standing a little way off, gazing with wondering eyes at the scene, though too young to comprehend its purport. The man stepped towards him to pick him up, but with a swift movement the mother anticipated him, and snatched the child away—

‘You shall not even touch him. He is mine. Go, in mercy go, and leave me in peace. Have you not made me endure enough already?’

‘Give me the boy—by law I have the first right to him; otherwise I prosecute Darly.’

It is truly said that the most timid creature will fight in defence of her young.

She turned upon him, a steadier look in the frightened eyes, a firmer resolve on the white lips, though her whole form trembled.

‘You will never have the child while I live; and you shall not injure Darly; he is good and kind to me as you never were.’

Then with a cry of appeal—

‘Oh, Mr. Grantley, have you no pity? Will you not save me from this fiend?’



Darling River Aboriginal.

PHOTO: KERRY & CO.



Her whole manner had made it so manifest to Roland that she was a wronged and outraged woman, that he had softened in his judgment and all but acquitted her. At her appeal he interposed and said to Cowler—

‘ You have had the interview I promised, evidently with no success. Now go, and if you want redress, seek it by legal means ; you shall not distress her further.’

‘ Well, fetch Daryl ; I must see him. Then I will go.’

Not fathoming the villain’s motive, Grantley moved towards the house with the intention of sending Peerton for Daryl. He had only gone half-way when piercing screams rose behind him, and, turning, he saw the ruffian rushing in at the kitchen door, tomahawk in hand. Not even in that desperate last rush for life at the Murray Mouth, when the savages were close behind, did Roland’s feet fly faster than now. Almost in a bound he was back, and heard at the same moment the thud of the first blow. There the murderer stood with his axe raised to strike the cowering form a second time, while his victim shrank in the corner with her arms uplifted to protect her head, uttering the wildest shrieks of terror.

Grantley threw himself upon her assailant and tore him away from her. Then began a struggle between the two. Cowler was armed, while the squatter was weaponless, but the latter had his arms locked round the former, pinning his hands down in a firm hug. Once the villain shook himself free, and the tomahawk, aimed at Roland’s head, descended with murderous force, but he caught the handle in his left hand just in time. He felt the hot breath of his opponent on his face, as they strained together in the desperate strife. The next moment they swayed and fell violently, Grantley uppermost, his right hand grasping Cowler’s throat, and his knee on his chest, while, with a fierce light in his eyes and a stern frown on the resolute brow, the words hissed from his set teeth—

‘ You damnable scoundrel, make one movement and you are a dead man.’

The fellow’s eye quailed. He had raised the tomahawk

for another blow, but Roland wrung it from his grasp ; then he threw his arms back upon the floor muttering—

‘ Do with me as you will ; I have done what I intended.’

Grantley, divining what he meant, glanced up, and, as he beheld the moaning woman huddled against the wall, with her long hair hanging loose and the blood streaming down it from a gaping wound in her head, while her arms yet moved as if to ward off the pitiless blows, he thought, ‘ You have indeed accomplished your fiendish purpose.’

He looked round for help, and at last saw the wide-open eyes of the little black girl, Miola, peeping in at a crevice between the slabs of the wooden building.

‘ Run and tell Mr. Peerton to bring the handcuffs,’ he said.

The overseer soon came, and in a moment, with grim satisfaction Grantley snapped the irons on the ruffian’s wrists and ordered him outside under Peerton’s charge. Then he lifted the wounded woman on to a couch and examined her injuries. Much to his relief, they appeared not so serious as he anticipated, though the cut on the top of the head was deep and bled freely. She had by this time recovered consciousness and complained of great pain, murmuring with her face as white as if death were already upon it—‘ Oh, my head, my head !’

He gently washed the blood away and bound up the wound with wet bandages. This done, she grew more composed, and begged that Darly might be sent for.

‘ But, Mr. Grantley, don’t let the men meet, or there will be murder yet,’ she added.

Miola had already been despatched for him, and, as he would certainly hurry down, the prisoner was sent out of the way, Peerton looking as if he hoped he would attempt to escape, that he might have an opportunity of knocking him on the head. Perhaps Cowler was aware of this, or else he felt escape hopeless, for he made no further resistance. He seemed utterly crestfallen and sullenly indifferent to his fate. He only said when he heard that his wife had recovered consciousness—

‘ If it had not been for Mr. Grantley, all would have been over with her, curse him ! ’ and a black scowl came over the evil face.

Roland heard the expression, and turned upon him with withering contempt—

‘ You are baffled in a deliberate attempt to commit murder, for which you deserve hanging. At the best you are a miserable scoundrel, whose threats or curses are of no more account than your last night’s promises. You are too despicable to be worth the killing ; I thought so when my blood was up and my hand on your throat. Only a cowardly cur would use a tomahawk on a woman. Take the wretch away.’

Without answering a word, the ruffian was marched off before Peerton to the other side of the station buildings and out of sight.

He had scarcely disappeared when Darly came on the scene. Roland met him at the threshold and said—

‘ A scoundrel has attempted to murder your wife, but I think she is not seriously hurt. When you have seen her, you had better come to me ; I shall be in the house.’

The man was much agitated, and merely replying, ‘ Yes, sir,’ he went into the kitchen.

Though the worst signs of what had transpired were cleared away, there was still enough remaining to make a man who loved the woman who lay there, pale and apparently almost lifeless, with a bloody bandage round her head, feel that the first object in existence for him was to crush the life out of the fiend who had thus injured her. Darly quickly comprehended all as he saw the corner where she had sunk down still splashed with her blood.

‘ Oh, Bert,’ she whispered, ‘ he would have killed me only for Mr. Grantley. I thought he would be sure to murder the master with that awful tomahawk.’

‘ I’ll tear the dog limb from limb,’ muttered the enraged man.

‘ No, dear, you must not. I have made Mr. Grantley promise that you shall not meet, unless you give your word that you will not touch him.’

'I can't keep my hands off him,' said he.

'Ah, but you must. It's bad enough as it is, without making it worse. We ought to have told the master after all his kindness. He would never have turned us away then ; but perhaps he will now that he finds we have deceived him.'

And the little woman became so agitated that Darly was ready to promise anything.

'Don't fret yourself,' said he, when she was more composed ; 'Mr. Grantley is not the sort to let that make any difference now, I'll lay my life on it.'

'Oh, Bert, wasn't it good and brave of him to risk his life unarmed in that way ? We can never be thankful enough, can we, to him ?'

'Never, and I'll tell him so ; but now you must be quiet.'

'Well, promise to let that fearful man go ; perhaps he will never trouble me again.'

'I'll tell him that if ever he does I'll wring his neck, though I have to follow him round the world to do it.'

Then he left her and sought his master.

'Mr. Grantley,' he said, and his voice trembled, 'I will never forget what you have done for me to-day.'

'Say no more,' was the quiet reply ; 'I should be ashamed of myself if I had done less. It would have been better if you had told me sufficient of your story for me to have prevented this, but I suppose neither of you liked doing so. You might have trusted me, however.'

'I wish to God we had, sir. She wished it, but I could not bring myself to the point, though I thought of it many times.'

'Well, never mind that. The question is, what are we to do with the villain now we've got him ? I have almost promised the poor woman he has nearly killed to let him go, but I have not said I won't tie him up to yonder fence and flog half the life out of his cowardly body first.'

'I have promised her,' replied Darly with slow reluctance, 'not only to let him go, but to lay no hand upon him. She



says she would rather die than go into a court and have her life raked up.'

'Then it appears we are a pair of soft asses,' said Grantley with grim humour, 'and, as usual, a woman must have her way. Still, I have not given up the fence or the whip. Come along—we will see how he likes the prospect.'

The prisoner stood leaning against a tree, with Peerton on guard beside him, and as the two men approached he threw a furtive glance at Darly and then bent his eyes on the ground. Roland walked close up to him and said—

'I suppose you know you have not quite succeeded in killing your wife, though you tried your level best, you treacherous dog; but you've done enough to get you seven years' imprisonment, if I hand you over to the police.'

'Do your worst,' was the sullen answer.

'It's rather difficult to decide which is the worst. The shearers up yonder would gladly toss you into the river. There is some one here,' indicating Darly, 'who would like to have five minutes alone with you. For myself, I incline to stretching you against that fence and giving you fifty with the stock-whip.'

The words were spoken in a calm, mocking tone, but the flashing eyes told that the speaker's composure was only assumed. Cowler shrank under them, and at last whined out—

'Let me go, and I'll never come back again.'

'I'll take good care, if you ever do, that a fitting reception awaits you,' replied Grantley.

Just then his wife tottered up, weak and fainting.

'Please let him go,' she cried.

'I am a magistrate,' he answered coldly, 'and it is my duty to hand the criminal over to justice, and yours to give evidence against him.'

'I cannot, I cannot,' she wailed. 'I should die of shame. You are very, very hard, Mr. Grantley.'

Without a syllable in reply, he signed to Peerton to take off the handcuffs.

‘Go,’ he said to Cowler, ‘and be thankful to the woman you have injured ; for by Heaven, but for her, you would scarcely have escaped with half your skin on.’

Completely cowed, the ruffian slunk away through the trees, while the four silently watched him.

When he had disappeared, Grantley turned to the wife and said :

‘The Christian doctrine of forgiveness is lost on such as he. “An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a life for a life,” is the only gospel for a nature like that. Don’t you think you have done a foolish thing?’

‘I have done what I thought right,’ she replied, as Darly took her in his arms and bore her into their room.

## CHAPTER V

### ROLAND’S RESPONSIBILITIES INCREASE

‘I SUSPECT I shall see that fellow again some day,’ observed Roland reflectively to Peerton.

‘And when you do you had better be prepared for the worst,’ was the reply ; ‘for if ever one man meant to be revenged upon another, he does on you.’

‘It’s not a remarkably pleasant reflection that the evil scoundrel may be prowling round any day or night ; but I daresay I shall manage to sleep in spite of it. Now, let us be off to the shearing-shed. Darly must stay with the little woman, of course.’ Great had been the excitement among the shearers and employees generally on hearing of the attack upon Mrs. Darly, and considerable indignation was manifested at her assailant having been suffered to escape. None, however, expressed this opinion to Roland, much less openly blamed him. On the contrary, from the tone of the conversation on the ‘floor,’ they evidently felt great admiration for their master’s courage. Only one individual at the station, a Mr. Thomas Hazle, ventured to plainly declare his

disapproval. He was an old friend, staying as a guest at the station, where he was always welcome. His temper was as unsatisfactory as the liver that caused it, and his manner blunt, honest, and outspoken. He was tall and somewhat stout, though with thin legs and very drooping shoulders. His features were irregular and even plain, and his face habitually wore a decidedly cross expression. In short, he was emphatically a cross-grained old gentleman—for he was fully sixty—and yet withal a true friend, and to those who understood him a pleasant companion. There was no polite fencing with him. 'I consider you were a d——d fool, Grantley, not to knock that fellow on the head with his tomahawk, when you had him down ; I would have done it,' said he.

'I don't doubt it,' replied Roland ; 'but then I am not such a bloodthirsty, impetuous old ruffian as you are.'

'Maybe you 'll live to regret it. You won't have such another chance. No one could have blamed you. As it is, that scoundrel will very likely repeat his attempt when you least expect it. From what Peerton tells me he means to be even with you yet.'

'Possibly you are right, but somehow I did not feel the slightest temptation to kill him at the time. Probably I should if a similar occasion recurred. Anyhow, I am glad of it now. Perhaps it is because my liver is all right. I took some anti-bilious pills last night.'

'You may try to make a jest of it, but it's a devil of a mistake to let such a splendid opportunity of disposing of a dangerous enemy slip.'

'Quite so,' said the other ; 'I suppose I have not got the true fighting instinct. Still, if there had been another fellow ready for me, I might have met your views by tapping the recumbent ruffian on the head with the convenient tomahawk ; but as there was not, and the solitary foe had given up hostilities, why, giving quarter struck me as the correct thing to do. I had not time to consider the inconveniences that, according to your ideas, will follow.'

'You would exasperate a saint,' retorted Hazle ; 'but for

the woman's sake, as well as your own, you have acted like an idiot.'

'Well, that never occurred to me. If I had knocked him on the head, she might have married Darly and all would have ended happily. Another instance of a good play spoilt by the stupidity of a clumsy actor.'

'Leaving this part of the matter, which I consider you made such a mess of, firstly by not braining the wretch when he was in your power, and secondly by letting him go at large to murder you at his leisure,' said Hazle, 'what are you going to do with the couple themselves?'

The cynical smile left Grantley's face, and he answered quickly, 'I will reply to that question by asking what you would do in my place. You know the woman; you have heard from what passed between them something of what he made her suffer. In short, you understand the circumstances. Would you turn her away?'

'No, I'd be d——d if I would,' was the emphatic reply.

'Neither will I, whatever may be the consequences to myself,' said Roland. 'I have had to judge between her and her husband, and have already acquitted her, and, so long as she likes to remain in my employ, to the best of my ability I will protect her.'

And he did, never by word or sign allowing her to think that he regarded her with less respect than in the days when he believed her to be a wedded wife living with her husband.

Grantley was not a man who invited advice or interference, and few of his neighbours ventured to broach the subject. There was but one woman within a radius of many miles, a good, motherly creature of mature age, who conceived it to be her duty to expostulate with him.

'Send her away,' she said; 'an unfaithful wife ought not to be allowed to remain on a respectable station like yours. No sin can be worse. Besides, you should think of the dreadful consequences that may follow.'

'I think of nothing,' he replied, 'except that she is an unhappy, injured woman, who relies on me for protection.'

'She has no claim on you, and has already brought danger and trouble, which only by the mercy of God have not cost you your life.'

'She has this claim, that I have saved her life, and I feel I have thus an interest in her that no stranger could inspire. No ; so long as she desires to stay, she shall. Neither will I constitute myself her accuser or judge. I am not without sin myself, that I should cast the first stone.'

'You are a young man, and, depend upon it, are doing a foolish thing, which you will yet repent.'

'As to the first, yes ; as to the other, no. My sympathies all go with the weaker—the woman tied to a repulsive, inhuman ruffian, from whom there is practically no release except by the mode she has adopted. Of course, good women and happy wives must draw close their immaculate skirts, lest they touch such as the little sinner who is under my roof ; but, as I and those with me are far beyond the possibility of further contamination by even hardened evildoers, it would be rank hypocrisy to affect to fear it. Besides, I honestly believe she is the best of the lot of us.'

What could be done with such a man ? The fair adviser returned home with very mingled feelings, in which an unacknowledged admiration for Grantley's conduct was not absent. 'I hope it will end well,' was the only conclusion which she, with many shakes of her matronly head, could arrive at.

For months after the events above narrated, arms were kept loaded on the station, and on no occasion was Mrs. Darly left without at least one man with her. No tidings were, however, heard of Cowler, and gradually the apprehension that he would make another attack upon her grew less.

Edgar Peerton was appointed manager of Purndal on the Queensland border, now sufficiently developed to carry a large number of sheep. The aboriginal outlaw and patriot, Baldy, had not come in from his fastnesses ; but, though obdurate to all the white intruder's overtures, he never gave any further trouble. His countrymen shepherded the flocks

with due diligence and care, and were of the utmost value in carrying on the general work of the new station. For a considerable period after its formation, Grantley paid frequent visits to superintend operations ; but, finding that the rapid increase of stock on Moolahalla made greater demands upon his attention, he left more and more to Peerton as time went on.

So some two years passed over without any stirring occurrence, and there was every prospect of the young squatter becoming a very rich man. Both sheep and cattle had multiplied fast under the favourable conditions of recent seasons.

‘ Only let it continue a little longer, and I will sell out and let the next man make the big pile,’ he said to Hazle, who had returned after a long absence to pay him another visit.

‘ Quite time too,’ replied that candid friend, ‘ or you will grow into a shocking cross old man, judging from what I have seen of your temper lately.’

‘ What is the matter now ? ’ said the other. ‘ I ’m not angelic, but I do manage to control myself somewhat. If I want to lick a nigger I can wait to get a whip, and not waste in my passion a good leg of mutton by thrashing him with it.’

‘ It ’s a base exaggeration,’ retorted Hazle hotly ; ‘ the mutton was not wasted ; I made the beggar take it as part of his rations when I had done with it.’

‘ Well, I daresay he did not object to the flavour imparted to it by your energetic application of it to his person ; but don’t you think you are a nice old man to pass reflections on another’s temper ? ’ asked Roland.

‘ Suppose we drop the subject. You are a devil to argue, particularly when you haven’t a leg to stand on. By-the-by, I ’m told you are going to build a new house, and that Darly has taken the contract for the job.’

‘ That is so,’ said Grantley, ‘ and they will be leaving in a few days to begin cutting the timber.’

‘ What about another cook ? You will never get one half as good as the little woman.’

‘There is a fellow in the men’s hut going to take the billet.’

‘That scoundrel with the squint eye?’ asked Hazle, ‘and the extremely dirty hands?’

‘I’ve not observed any peculiarity in the latter respect about him—indeed, regarding the hands, they all seem much alike; but there is no doubt about the squint. Miola, the black girl, has become quite proficient, and can keep the house clean.’

‘But what about the food?’ said Hazle.

‘What the eye doesn’t see—I suppose you know the rest.’

‘I don’t think I’ll prolong my visit more than a few days under these unexpected circumstances; I fear the grub will be execrable.’

‘Make up for it with the liquor,’ suggested his host; ‘I despise a man whose deity is enshrined in his digestive organs.’

‘Ignoring your last remark, I admit that you have put the matter in a more alluring light, and I will reconsider my determination to depart from your hospitable roof.’

‘Which means that you will stay as long as the liquor lasts.’

‘Or you turn me out,’ said Hazle. ‘None the less, I am truly sorry the little woman is going, and I’ll go and tell her so. Her soup was divine.’

\* \* \* \* \*

There had been no rain for many months, and there was every appearance of the drought continuing—at least so said the weatherwise. Strong drying winds swept over the country day after day, evaporating the waters with a rapidity that appalled the stockholders. The grass was withered up and pounded into dust under the feet of the cattle and sheep, who had to come long distances to drink. These were the old shepherding days, when fencing was unknown and the runs were not so heavily stocked as subsequently when enclosed, and when they much sooner became barren wastes.

It may be safely said that, when the flocks were driven daily from the folding-yards to and from grass and water,

more food was destroyed than eaten, and that under that primitive system the country could not sustain half the number it afterwards did when the animals roamed at large. It became evident that, unless rain fell soon, the desperate course would have to be adopted of discharging the shepherds and turning the flocks loose on the open run. Bad as was the outlook at Moolahalla, it appeared to be worse at Purndal. Peerton wrote :—

‘ I don’t think the water will last a month ; and if we delay until then, it is probable that the roads will be closed and we shall not be able to get the sheep away at all. The responsibility is greater than I like to undertake. It is for you to see for yourself and decide what is to be done. Stay, and chance rain falling in time to save the stock ; or travel them at once.’

‘ There is a comforting sort of a letter for a man to receive,’ said Grantley to Hazle.

‘ He ’s a matter-of-fact beggar, that Peerton,’ replied the latter, ‘ and has put that about as concisely as pen and ink will do it. You ’re between the devil and the deep sea.’

‘ I must start up without delay and settle the knotty point, and by the time I return here there will be much the same problem to face.’

‘ It can’t be denied that you bloated squatters (that ’s the coming phrase) do get a gruelling occasionally,’ observed Hazle ; ‘ but then you ought to have left the country to the black fellows ; it ’s only fit for them.’

‘ You are as true a specimen of a Job’s comforter as a fellow in a hole could desire ; but I suppose you will remain here till I get back, and keep things together a bit ? ’ said Roland.

‘ I ’m like your sheep, in a dilemma between bad grub (your new cook’s awful) on the station and maybe worse on the road. My horses are as poor as South Australian crows ; you know they are starved and hunted out of there, and have come up here to be out of danger, poor things. Of course I ’ll stop and do my best during your absence.’

‘ I ’ll consider that a bargain,’ said Grantley, ‘ and start tomorrow night, taking Jollyboy and the three best horses with



me that can be got in. There are ninety miles without water, and in the hottest January I have ever experienced even in this infernal climate ; that is serious enough.'

'So it is,' returned Hazle ; 'but you are young, hard as nails, and about the coolest card in a difficulty that can be found in many a day's march. Besides that, you've never got a thirst, which may be an advantage where there are nearly a hundred long miles to cover without a drink, but which is a deplorable misfortune where the liquor is as good as this and there is plenty of it.'

Here a rather tall native girl entered. Her colour was not black, but, as is sometimes the case with the full-blooded natives, of a rich, tawny brown more resembling the hue of the Red Indian than that of the negro. The texture of her skin was velvety, and the bloom of her cheeks flushed through like the blush of her fairer sisters. Her hair, unlike the usually straight locks of her people, curled crisply round her face, the two most prominent features in which were her splendid glistening white teeth and large, sparkling bright eyes. Her figure, though far from perfect, was well formed, and her whole appearance both striking and pleasing. By no means the least of her charms was a voice soft and musical as the sweetest notes of one of her country's birds. It was the little native girl, Miola, grown almost to womanhood. Neatly attired in a loose-fitting print frock of her own making, she stood silently in the doorway waiting to be addressed.

'Well, Miola,' said Grantley, 'I am going to the Paroo to-morrow. You had better tell the cook to get something ready for me.'

There was this peculiarity about Miola, that, though her master was the only white person on the station who could speak her native language fluently, she spoke to him alone in pure English.

'The blacks say,' she replied, 'that there is no water, and that you will die. Some people are dead on the road now.'

'Very likely they are,' he answered, 'but I am not going to be one of them. Is that all you have come to tell me ?'

‘Do you know that Mrs. Darly has got a “piccaninny,” a little girl, and she is very ill, and they don’t think she will live?’

‘Who?’ broke in Hazle—‘the mother or the child?’

‘I said the mother,’ she answered, still looking at and addressing Grantley as though he were alone.

‘I am very sorry, Miola,’ he said; ‘but is it so bad as that?’

‘The old women say so,’ she replied. ‘The baby was born yesterday, and she is getting worse. Can’t you do anything for her?’ she added in an appealing tone.

‘I am afraid, my girl, that my knowledge and experience in such abstruse matters are extremely limited.’

‘I don’t understand that English,’ said Miola: ‘why don’t you speak plainly?’

Hazle laughed.

‘Tooluc murray imba’—(literally ‘very bad you’)—retorted Miola quickly.

‘You see,’ said Roland seriously, ‘I am not a married man, and don’t know anything about babies and their mothers.’

‘Well, you know what to do and doctor ewes when they have lambs and are ill; you got plenty medicine in the store,’ she persisted.

‘God bless me, what am I to do in a quandary like this, with such a girl?’ cried the young man.

‘She’ll die, if you don’t do something, and that will be a great pity,’ urged Miola.

‘Here is Mr. Hazle—he’s the father of a large family, and knows more of such things.’

‘He’s no use,’ she replied with infinite contempt; ‘you are the master and know best.’

‘You are a good, kind girl, Miola,’ he said gently, ‘and if I could help her I would; but I cannot—I don’t know how.’

‘But when old man Jack’s lubra had her *perlo* (child) you gave her some physic which cured her. Why can’t you, now that one of your own country is ill?’

‘Miola, your logic is too much for me. I’ll see Darly and talk to him about it.’

Not half satisfied, the girl departed, her faith in the ability of the master to cope with every emergency evidently greatly shaken for the time.

## CHAPTER VI

### A DROUGHT AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

AT the hour appointed, Grantley took his departure mounted on the Star, still full of life, though his condition showed the effects of the bad season. After leaving the last water, a small spring some thirty miles from Moolahalla, late in the evening, he travelled on part of the night and then camped. It was a calm, hot night, and, as it was necessary to watch the horses to prevent them straying too far to admit of an early start in the morning, he obtained little sleep. At peep of day Jollyboy was roused and a hearty breakfast partaken of. The sable attendant then brought up the horses, and a movement was made. By some means a pair of handcuffs were left, or so insecurely packed up that they were lost on the road before the next halt. Roland had always carried these and a revolver on his journeys, never knowing when they might be required, as the blacks were occasionally troublesome, and they served to overawe the turbulent. Then there was always the chance of Cowler turning up at the least-expected moment.

Lately, too, a considerable amount of bushranging had been prevalent, though not within a hundred miles or so of Moolahalla. Could Grantley have foreseen the important part the loss of these fetters played in what followed, he would have been still more annoyed at his carelessness, and would probably have risked retracing his steps through the dry stage for the purpose of recovering them. All that day, with the exception of an hour’s camp, when the scorching heat was at its highest, they travelled on, and late at night reached the water. The country was in a miserable condition: grass

had all but disappeared, and what was left was devoid of nourishment for the unfortunate animals that had to subsist upon it. The hardy bushes of Central Australia, principally of a saline character, that appear to live, and often even thrive, without moisture, were withered and dying, or already burnt up and dead. The larger trees were drooping their leaves, as if despairing of life, in common with the rest of nature. Birds there were none ; even reptiles and insects were few in number ; but carcasses of horses, cattle, and sheep strewed the roadside, and not these alone, for poor humanity contributed its quota to the festering remains.

In one place a large flock of travelling sheep had attempted to cross a long distance without water, and had perished in thousands, lying in heaps under the scattered shade of trees and bushes, where they had lain down to escape something of the scorching heat of that pitiless sun. Not many miles from what, at that time, was a fine hole of water, though now it was a mere basin of fast-drying mud, the whole flock had been seized with that obstinate determination not to move which neither dogs nor men can shake. In the pioneer days of young Australia it was so often asseverated, that it grew into a belief, that an efficient bullock-driver could swear his team out of any ordinary bog, or other difficulty ; but no flood of oaths of doubly concentrated power was ever considered of the slightest use against the passive resistance of the mild jumbuck. It was an ugly sight for the uninterested passer-by ; but to the owner those rotting heaps meant ruin, and told a tale of blighted hopes or, it might be, even worse.

Roland Grantley, with his ever cheerful companion, had passed all these, which gave him abundant opportunity to ponder upon the obstacles and dangers which must attend any attempt to move his own flocks. When camped that night by the water, his reflections were of an essentially bitter character. There were several travellers waiting there for the long-expected rain, all of whom deprecated moving without very good horses as nothing less than courting a misera death. Numerous tales were told of loss of life



DEER CREEK  
 1



INTERIOR AND COUNTRY  
 1

PHOTO: J. C. REINERS  
 PHOTO: KERRY & CO.



within a few miles of the reservoir at which they were staying. One man said he had seen the bodies of two black fellows dead of thirst, but the experienced knew that the aborigines were too intimately acquainted with their country to meet such a fate. It was simply the result of that sun of fire which had burned the skin of two unhappy dead Europeans to blackness.

From some natives Roland learned that the waters of Purndal were failing fast, as indeed was the case all up the creek. They scouted the idea that any of their countrymen had perished of thirst.

‘That one stupid walk-about white fellow, bale black fellow,’ was their comment when spoken to on the subject.

Travelling slowly, he occupied two days more in reaching his destination. He was too well aware of the necessity of husbanding the strength of his horses to push them, knowing that in all probability he would require them not only after his arrival, but also for the daily increasing difficulties of the return journey. Everywhere were to be seen the ravages made by the drought, in stock dying and dead ; and clouds of dust enveloped those that trailed long distances back from water, where some vestiges of food remained. His own run seemed in no better plight. Between the boundary and the head station there was no water left ; and even there, in the usually splendid creek, less than three feet of water was the record of the morning measurement.

‘What about other parts of the run ?’ he asked Peerton.

‘In not a single hole is there more than here ; but it is holding out well, considering the intense heat. In some cases I have, according to your instructions, been able to empty smaller shallow holes into deeper ones, and so save evaporation. But now I see nothing for it but to look on, unless you decide to travel the stock.’

‘Down the creek is impossible,’ said Grantley. ‘I suppose we can go up yet ?’

‘Yes, by making long stages ; but the feed is bad and the loss certain to be great,’ replied Peerton.

'I never have travelled for feed,' said Grantley, 'and won't begin now if I can avoid it; but "needs must when the devil drives." How are we off for feed on the other portion of the station? There is about as much as you can put in your eye and see none the worse, where I came up.'

'In parts out back there is plenty, but it is as dry as timber, except in some places, where the bush is fairly green.'

'Have many niggers come in from the back-country, dried out?'

'Lots,' answered Peerton; 'and, among others, some of the Pernowries; but they are in a deuce of a funk lest our fellows kill them. They seem to come and get a supply of water, and then clear out back for a time. I heard the other day that they had to leave a couple of women behind the last time. It appears this tribe laid wait for and caught them.'

'Paying toll, I suppose,' observed Grantley; 'the old story of the weak and the strong, intensified by the hate of the uncircumcised for the circumcised. Queer those back-country beggars should practise something like that old Jewish rite. I'm too tired to moralise. By-the-by, how is the rugged old hero, or rogue, Baldy?'

'He's just about the same. I am told he won't have the Pernowries slaughtered or their women abused; perhaps he has an eye to the future, when the far-out country may be a necessary refuge for him,' replied Peerton.

'In this instance,' said Grantley, 'he draws the line at rape. Ah, well! men with better reputations than Baldy haven't done that.'

The sun rose again like a ball of fire, as it had done for weeks past; and as the squatter walked to the stockyard to inspect the horses, the utter hopelessness of the position could not but strike him. In the whole mob there was not one animal in fair working condition. The gallant Star was by far the best, though just off a trying journey.

'A sorry lot to start with on these roads after weak sheep,' he thought.



He met an ancient aboriginal, and accosted him in tones of assumed anger, 'Stupid devil black fellow, bale makum rain, jumbucka, bullocka, yarraman tumble down.'

'All about tumble down,' echoed the noble savage with a broad grin.

At this ready confirmation of his worst anticipations the much exasperated owner kicked the grinner into a becoming seriousness, and then went back to breakfast on lean mutton-chops.

All that day, and for several succeeding ones, he walked or rode over the run, judging the position for himself, and still determined to defer to the last moment the desperate expedient of travelling his sheep. He knew the loss must be enormous, whereas if he could hold on without moving them it would be comparatively light. Men were employed in sinking temporary wells in the drift of the creeks, and in some cases a fair amount of water was found, but it rapidly failed when drawn upon. Day by day the reserves grew lower under the combined effects of a blazing sun, furiously hot, drying winds, and the apparently insatiable thirst of thousands of sheep and cattle. Then came a dawn of hope; thick, heavy clouds began to collect in the brazen skies, only to disappear, however, without discharging their contents. For three or four days they grew blacker and more like rain; then, when a few drops had fallen, they cleared off again, and the following morning broke, disclosing as bright a canopy as the sun's rays ever poured down from upon the panting earth.

'You had better give the word to move,' expostulated Peerton that night; 'the rain has all passed off, and there is not more than enough water to give the sheep a really good drink before they start.'

Grantley took him to the door.

'Do you see that small black cloud rising over the forest to the north?' he asked. 'Ever since I have been here all the clouds have come up in the daytime. I believe that little spot is the sign of a storm. I shall wait and see.'

Later in the night the cloud spread, dull and leaden, over

the heavens, and thunder echoed in the distance. Still no rain fell, and the day opened fine and sultry.

'There has been a storm on the upper boundary in the night, Edgar ; send up and see,' said Grantley.

It was unnecessary ; long before the horses came in, a black fellow appeared at a trot with the glad tidings that a good waterhole was filled and the creek running.

'I know perfectly well what old Hazle will say,' remarked Grantley.

'What is that ?' asked Peerton.

'A fool's stupid obstinacy is often better than a wise man's wisdom ; that will be the substance of his flattering comment on my action, or rather want of it, since I have been here.'

The next day, and again the next, there were several heavy thunderstorms, and all cause for anxiety passed away. Roland was now busily occupied fixing sites for future water conservation, so that similar risks should not be incurred in the future. While thus engaged he was somewhat startled by the sudden appearance of a sergeant of police and five black troopers of the Queensland force. Grantley knew the officer, and accosted him with the words—

'Good day, sergeant. Blackbirding on forbidden ground again, eh ?'

'No ; I am not after any of your *protégés* this time. It's birds of another feather ; but perhaps you have not heard there has been an affray between bushrangers, supposed to be Thunderbolt's gang, and the New South Wales police on the Warrego. Sergeant M'Cabe was shot dead and a trooper wounded. One of the freebooters is certainly hit, but they escaped, and have been tracked over here. I expect to strike their trail out back on the road a little, unless they have been seen about here, which would save the time and trouble of going to search.'

'This is the first I have heard of it,' said Grantley ; 'but perhaps they came into the creek lower down.'

'I think not ; I am told they were making straight here. Can you put me on the Warrego road ? I hope to catch

them before going far out of my beat, otherwise I shall give it up.'

'I'm your man for the rest of the day,' said Roland. 'I never cared about it when you were hunting the poor devils of niggers, but it's another matter when your quarry is these white scoundrels.'

In the edge of the forest, beyond the margin of the plain, the quick eye of the leading trooper detected the tracks of three horses. He saluted and pointed them out to the sergeant. It appeared that, immediately on sighting the station, the band had halted and then turned away to the left down the creek. The trail was plain, and the trackers followed fast, one a little in advance, with another on either side some distance out, so that, if the middle tracker got thrown off the scent, one of those to the right or left would be certain to pick it up. The remainder of the party rode behind, all alert to play their part should occasion arise. Presently there was a pause, and the foremost trooper showed the officer where the wounded man had sat down, apparently to have his injury dressed, as there was dried blood on the ground.

'They passed along yesterday early, but I may pick them up yet,' said the sergeant. 'Push on, men.'

'I expect these fellows will give a good account of them, if you succeed,' observed Grantley, with a glance at the eager black bloodhounds.

The officer smiled. 'They will have to shoot well, if they are to beat my men off,' he said; 'but I fear they know we are after them, and will not stop long enough for me to pull them, with the start they have.'

'I am going down myself in a few days,' replied Roland; 'it would be a comfort to know the ruffians were safely out of the way.'

'I daresay; particularly as you have a horse there they would be sure to covet.'

'I don't think they will easily catch me, if I have the chance of showing them a clean pair of heels. Now, good-bye, and please God you may get them quickly.'

This, however, they did not do, notwithstanding that with unfailing skill the trackers followed on, often at a fast trot, from daylight to dark, when they were compelled to camp until morning. The men they were chasing knew this, and travelled part of the night, so that the distance separating the parties never greatly decreased. At the lower Paroo the tracking became more difficult, and, being far beyond the limit he originally intended going, the officer reluctantly abandoned the chase, and gave orders to return.

Meanwhile, Roland Grantley had completed his arrangements at Purndal, and, leaving Edgar Peerton in high spirits on account of the changed condition of the run under his charge, he turned his face towards Moolahalla.

‘I sincerely hope it has had a share of the rain too,’ he said, as he shook hands with his friend; ‘but it is not likely, as we hear of none down the creek, so I shall probably still have my hands full before the final break-up of the drought. I would send some of the sheep here if the road were open, but a hundred miles of howling wilderness is not to be spanned by weak sheep in these fearful summers.’

‘It strikes me,’ replied Peerton, ‘that you must be careful how you attempt it with horses scarcely fit to travel. Hadn’t you better spell them here for a week before going? they would carry you safely home in half the time then.’

‘No, I’ve been too long away already. Good-bye.’

Once on the road, Grantley was eager to be home. He knew quite well his presence was urgently demanded, for all had been accustomed to depend on him alone, and his absence had been prolonged considerably beyond the period originally allotted. Still, the effect of the first day on the horses plainly indicated that their strength must be carefully nursed, or they never could go through the long, waterless stage. The indomitable Star himself was little more than bones and muscle; and, though his spirit carried him on at the head of the party with much of his old springy stride, his rider felt he was really very weak. Fully conscious of the risk he was incurring, Roland instructed his two black boys, Jollyboy

and another who rejoiced in the appropriate name of Ugly Billy, to inquire of all blacks they met if partial thunderstorms had broken, leaving water in any direction that would shorten the wide interval of dry country. They would go across country, leaving the roads, if necessary, to obtain water and grass.

Riding slowly, on the third evening they arrived at the last water and camped until late the following afternoon. No aborigines were there, but during the morning Jollyboy and Billy heard from some higher up the creek that a shower had filled a small waterhole twenty miles lower down right by the track, but it might be dried up ; and, if so, there was plenty at Windolee, a larger basin several miles out of their course.

Relying on these reports, Grantley considered further caution unnecessary, and determined to push on at a faster rate ; and so, a little water-bag having been filled, the party started. ' There is sure to be a green spring at the water,' he thought, ' and we will camp there till daylight, or, if the feed is good, even later, for the sake of these poor wretches of horses.'

Thick darkness had fallen before they reached the spot, only to find that not one drop of the looked-for element remained, or apparently had been there for days past. Bitterly disappointed at such an unlooked-for result, the question now arose what was to be done. The boys reiterated that there was certainly water at Windolee, and pointed out that rain had fallen where they then stood, and, according to their informants, fell much heavier at that place. They had positively stated there was abundance there, and Jollyboy was confident he could find it in the dark. Seeing nothing better to be done, his master reluctantly gave the word to lead on.

They now found the water-bag had leaked out the whole of its contents, but, though annoying, this little mattered, if fresh supplies were to be obtained at Windolee. Roland's reflections were not pleasant. It seemed so probable that, if one hole had failed, another might also. As he rode on, there

was nothing to indicate that any weight of rain had fallen ; ' in which case we shall have made a mess of it,' he mused. He minutely watched, by observing the stars, that the boys kept a straight course, and allowed them to continue on. At length they drew up.

' This one close up Windolee,' said Jollyboy ; ' mine think it camp. Supposing water sit down, that one yarramen (horse) make-a-light himself. You see plenty yapunya (kind of eucalyptus) that long creek all same Windolee.'

' All right camp, but mine think it no water,' replied his master.

' Yes, water long, more further,' persisted the boy.

There was nothing else for it but to wait till morning ; but Grantley's heart misgave him when he saw the horses made no movement. They fed for a while on some miserable bushes, which appeared to satisfy them, and then stood still during the rest of the night.

As soon as the lingering daylight permitted, the squatter's fears were verified. To look for water there was worse than hopeless ; nothing could be more arid. No wonder the horses had stirred so little, for, except a few nearly dead sticks of ' old man ' salt bush, there was literally no kind of vegetation less in size than the eucalyptus.

What was to be done now ? Retrace their steps to the last water, or make a bold attempt to cross the long, dry stage to the spring, and so homeward ? Roland put it to the boys, telling them that years ago he buried two bottles of water at the ' Marked Tree,' which he thought he could find. For himself, he must and would go on, but if they chose they might turn back. At first they hesitated, and asked if he thought the horses capable of carrying them through. On being told that he did not doubt it, provided they rode very slowly, they promptly decided to accompany him. They had seen too much of their master to question his judgment, but their faith quickly received a rude shock. After proceeding a few miles, the pack-mare knocked up and refused to go any farther. Dismounting from the Star, Grantley unsaddled and

let her loose, putting a few of the necessities on each of the other horses. Then with an encouraging smile he said—

‘No yarramen to lead now, my boys, me and you pull away balara (well).’

Steadily they went on, making straight across the open country for the marked tree, the heat becoming more intense and the poor animals more jaded as each hour passed by. Roland led the way thus far, the others following at their own pace. At last they approached the spot, the well-known tree showing up on a small sand-rise. Leaving his horse under the shade of some overhanging boughs, Grantley walked to the place where he had buried the bottles two years before, perhaps with an instinctive feeling that it would some day be more priceless than gold. Laboriously he dug with a stick, taking the utmost precautions not to break the glass. At length he found one bottle, but, alas! not full; it had been laid on its side, and was either never filled or had leaked. Three parts of the precious contents were there, however, and, as he held it up, the two expectant black faces brightened. Loyalloy he divided it, only taking the first drink himself, and then they finished it to the last drop. Never was nectar sweeter or more welcome. The other bottle could not be discovered. It may be there to this day, and some poor unfortunate, all unknowing of its proximity, may lie down to die within a few inches of the draught that would save his life.

## CHAPTER VII

### BUSHRANGERS AT WORK

MR. HAZLE was not having a good time at Moolahalla, both sheep and shepherds giving him much trouble, as the manner of their kind is when a temporary chief is in command. Under such trials the old gentleman's temper not infrequently boiled over and vented itself in volleys of abuse. This was resented by both whites and blacks. From Grantley it would have

been submitted to as in some measure his right, to which it was their duty to listen, particularly as he rarely gave way to fits of passion ; but that a comparative stranger should usurp an owner's privilege was unendurable.

It was exasperating to Mr. Hazle, on the other hand, that he could scarcely ever go out to count sheep without discovering that some had been lost. This was generally followed by the delinquents adopting an injured tone.

'Send out another man ; I 'm not going to put up with this any longer, where a man isn't treated as a man.'

Probably there would be a further torrent of complaints on the part of the injured innocent, and the despairing Hazle would return home in a storm of vexation. Much of this trouble was, of course, attributable to the state of the country. All the back-waters were dried up, the sheep having to be brought in to the river to drink, and the grass along the frontage for miles had nearly all been swept off by travelling stock. As a natural consequence, there was greater difficulty in keeping the flocks together. He found that for him to attempt to do the amount of work systematically carried through by the energetic and untiring owner was to tax his capabilities too far. His orders, too, were not executed with the promptness and despatch that invariably attended Grantley's briefest mandates ; and this became latterly so apparent and annoying, that he cursed the day when he undertook the responsibility. Added to these disagreeables was the anxiety he felt respecting Mrs. Darly's health. He had always felt a sincere friendship for her, and when Roland left he went to Taila Bend to ascertain if he could be of any use. She was then delirious, and calling almost incessantly on Darly and Grantley to save her from Cowler ; but her case was not then considered at all hopeless. There were intervals, indeed, in which the improvement appeared so marked that reports came to the station that she was recovering fast. Miola was most assiduous in her attentions, and went up nearly every day to assist and inquire what was wanted that the resources of the house could supply.



More than three weeks had passed since Grantley's departure, when one evening the girl came and told Hazle that the poor woman was very much worse. That same night she died, and the troubled spirit was at rest at last. Truth to tell, she had never recovered from the blow and the discovery that attended it; too sensitive to bear the consciousness that her unhappy history was known, with all its unmerited suffering and shame. When her troubled life was drawing to its close, the delirium left her, and she asked for Mr. Grantley. On hearing that he was far away, she told Darly to thank him for the gentle kindness with which he had never ceased to treat a poor, sinning woman, when most men would have cast her out.

'He saved my life at the risk of his own,' she whispered, 'but that was not half so much as protecting me ever since. Tell him that I died thanking him.'

Then she told Bert Darly he must take the children to her mother, and with a few incoherent words she passed away. Who shall say that much may not be forgiven her, for she loved—and suffered—much?

The day after, she was buried beside the other unfortunates who gave up their lives on Moolahalla in the early days. On the sandhill they lie, the strong men cut down in their strength and prime, the worn and toil-stricken. Among them is the grave of the solitary woman and young mother. Who shall judge her? Certainly not the rugged men who have gazed on that last resting-place; for of them there is none, knowing the tale of that unhappy life, who would not answer at the final bar for her sins rather than his own.

This sad event affected Mr. Hazle profoundly, and in pondering over it he almost forgot his accumulated station troubles. He even felt it some relief when Darly left with the children, which he did the day after their mother was buried. A mournful episode in life seemed ended then, and might be cleared up, if not forgotten. In cities such an incident would excite but a passing interest; but in the remote bush, where you yourself are one of the players and

witness each move in the game, it is very different. The mere casual contact with such events, where men do congregate, makes no lasting impression ; but in nature's lonely haunts the mark left is so indelible that it may tinge a lifetime.

\*       \*       \*       \*       \*       \*       \*

'That old man white fellow Scotty losum jumbuck, Misser Hazle.'

The time was early morning, and the words proceeded from a cleft in a flat black surface, round in form, which surmounted a scraggy body without any particular shape. This was perched on two attenuated sticks, that could scarcely truthfully be denominated legs. The flat, or rather irregular, surface, which a closer examination demonstrated to be a human countenance, had only one eye, and that not worthy of the name, except as an extraordinary illustration of what Nature can accomplish when the fit is on her. That any power of vision should reside in the knobbly, patched-up organ of many colours was inconceivable ; yet by some means it was so. In a moment of playful sarcasm Grantley, in his capacity of general namer, had bestowed on this object the title of Prettyboy. In ignorance of the meaning of the mockery, the recipient at first was supremely proud and happy ; but later, when a glimmering of the truth dawned upon his benighted mind, a rankling sense of injury possessed his soul, and threats of absconding were frequently made, unless a more fitting sobriquet were conferred.

He had pushed open the door, and now stood by Mr. Hazle's bedside.

'You are a nice sort of apparition to set one's eyes upon first thing in the morning in this year of our Lord 185—,' growled the white man.

'You make haste get up ; look out that one jumbuck. Plenty dingo (wild dog) sit down ; Misser Grantlee big one sulky, supposin' dingo *pium* (kill them).'

'You dirty, jabbering baboon !' shouted the exasperated old gentleman, 'shall I go after them in my night-shirt ?'

'That one Scotty yabber mine pull away yabber you, losem all about jumbuck,' persisted Prettyboy.

'You 'll lose your life, let alone your beauty, if you don't clear out of this,' roared Hazle, hurling a boot at him. Seeing that the atmosphere had become electrical, the zealous messenger departed.

'Not one wink of sleep all night from the cursed mosquitos, and then my beauty-sleep broken in upon by that abortion! It's simply damnable.'

Grumbling thus, the aggrieved superintendent slipped into his garments in that sort of temper that is frequently described as the result of 'having got out of bed on the wrong side.' Scarcely was this accomplished, when a quick step sounded on the verandah, and he found himself confronted by a revolver at full-cock pointed straight at his head, while a rough voice said in imperative tones—

'Bail up, or I 'll blow the b——y roof off your head!'

The old gentleman looked at the levelled weapon and the bushranger who held it, with a steady eye.

'Fire away,' he said, 'I had just as soon die as live.'

The unexpected reply for a moment surprised the outlaw, then he replied—

'Promise, Mr. Hazle, that you won't in any way attempt to interfere with us, and I 'll not trouble you.'

'All right, I give my word. It is the business of the police to take you, not mine.'

'You must send for the horses, though, and we shall help ourselves to what we want out of the house and store.'

'You have the power to do just as you please, I can't prevent it,' said Hazle.

'We require breakfast too,' demanded the man of the bush.

'That I would give to any one,' was the curt answer. 'Now we understand each other, suppose you lower that d——d thing. It might go off, you know, quite unintentionally.'

‘ You are a cool one, Mr. Hazle, and neither I nor any of us have a quarrel with you so long as you keep quiet.’

The two walked together to the front of the kitchen, where the station men were drawn up in a row against the wall, an armed man, who might at once be recognised as Cowler, standing on guard over them. Two others had gone to the blacks camp and were marching them down in a body. The surprise had been sudden and complete, no time or opportunity having been afforded for communication between the whites and the natives.

‘ Where is my wife ? ’ demanded Cowler, as Hazle approached.

‘ Dead and buried.’

‘ A good thing for her,’ rejoined the ruffian ; ‘ I heard I would be too late to give her what I meant. And Darly, I want him ? ’

‘ Then you must go down the river ; he left with the children.’

‘ Curse it, what bad luck ! all my friends are away. Now no d——d lies,—when is Grantley to be back ? ’

‘ That I can’t tell, for I don’t know.’

‘ You must know when you expect him,’ and the revolver was pointed at Hazle’s head.

‘ I have expected him for a week past,’ he replied.

‘ Do you know what I would have done with him if I had caught him ? Taken him out into the back-country and left him tied to a tree for the crows to eat.’

Here the tall, dark man, apparently the leader, who accompanied Hazle, broke in—

‘ Send one of the black boys for the horses, and order the cook to get breakfast, and while that is being prepared, we will search for fire-arms and ammunition.’

By the time these necessities of the bushranger’s vocation had been obtained and the cash-box had been rifled, the repast was ready and was heartily partaken of by the freebooters. This over, the one styled by his fellows ‘ captain ’ ordered a couple of bottles of spirits to be brought out.

‘That won’t hurt us,’ he said, ‘as I mean to give all hands a drink for standing quiet so long.’

When it came, he handed a glassful round to each man and divided the remainder among his band.

‘Tell Mr. Grantley,’ he remarked in a jocose tone, ‘that his liquor is A 1. Also express my regret that he was not at home, as all of us have a little account to settle with him, my friend Cowler most of all. There come the horses: now, Mr. Hazle, I expect you to point out the pick of the mob for our use.’

On reaching the yard, it was evident the leader needed no assistance in the selection of horses. He immediately pitched upon Hazle’s own favourite hack, as being the best in condition, if not in quality.

‘Don’t take that,’ the old man exclaimed ruefully, ‘it’s my property, and I am going on a journey shortly.’

‘Very well,’ was the unexpected reply, ‘then tell me which four you recommend. I am a gentle thief, am I not?’

‘The most polite I ever met, or ever expect to meet,’ returned Hazle. ‘Now if you can ride well, that colt is the pick of the lot. He is broken in, but bucks.’

‘I’ll try him,’ promptly declared the man of daring deeds.

The animal was with some trouble caught and saddled; then, with all the address of an accomplished horseman, the captain mounted and gently put him into motion. At first the colt moved quietly off, then, suddenly throwing his ears back and his head down, he in horsey parlance ‘set to work.’ There was no pretence about it. Steed and rider were fairly pitted against each other, and, for the few minutes the struggle lasted, it seemed that no mortal man could retain his seat on top of that plunging circle, for such was the form into which the horse threw himself. Presently, apparently satisfied with the result, the colt straightened himself and stepped proudly on.

‘I like him,’ said the bushranger, ‘but he don’t suit my business. He would always be unsafe with fire-arms.’

Then dismounting without being in the least put out, he

took off his saddle and bridle and again began minutely examining the others.

Eventually, after much close criticism, he chose four, one for each of his band. On these they mounted, and, leaving those they had been riding, they departed, the leader observing as he rode off—

‘Let the boss know that we hope he will like our old screws as much as I am sure we shall our new mounts.’

When they had gone, Mr. Hazle made an entry in his pocket-book to the following purport :—‘Cowler & Co., dr. to Roland Grantley. Four horses at £20 per head. One double-barrelled gun at £15. Two revolvers at £10. Ammunition at £3. Cash £17, 10s. Sundries £5. Total £140, 10s.’

‘I am inclined, gentlemen of the road,’ said he, ‘to fancy that the proprietor of this establishment will scarcely think he has received a fair equivalent for this amount, and, as he is a man who rather looks to reaping where he has not sown than scattering favours broadcast, it is probable he will on some day of reckoning require a balance to be struck not agreeable to you. Possibly this memo. may be of use to remind him what the precise indebtedness amounts to. That Cowler is an atrocious scoundrel ; luckily he is kept under by the tall, civil fellow, or we might have fared worse. I shall be a bit sorry to hear of the big brute being hanged, though he did stick me up at first, but, by the Lord, I’d go fifty miles to see that snarling dog triced up. In fact I’d do it myself and eat my breakfast directly after with an improved appetite. Prettyboy, you and me go on look out walk about jumbuck, make haste gettum *yarraman* (horses).’

‘Bale (no),’ said that sable servitor, ‘too much plenty bushranger. That one big one sulky shootem mine. Tomorrow mine think it catchem jumbuck.’

Leaving the irascible Hazle to kick the pusillanimous Prettyboy into a proper state of subjection, we will follow the bushrangers.

For two hours they rode silently up the river on the north side, and then the leader, who was a short distance in advance,

Moolahalla,  
River Darling.



PHOTO: CAPTAIN RITCHIE





halted until the others joined him. A few words passed between them and they parted, the tall man saying to Cowler—

‘Jack, of course, goes with you, to make the matter sure, for if he gets the chance he will fight like hell. I don’t care what you do with him, but don’t hurt the Star, whatever happens, and don’t fail to bring him.’

‘I’ll both serve Grantley as I said, and bring the horse too,’ replied Cowler with an oath.

‘We shall wait at the camp till you join us, and mind, if you fail in any part of the plan so that suspicion is likely to be excited, don’t delay, but follow at once.’

Cowler and Jack now struck out from the river into the back-country, and after about twelve miles came to a shepherd’s hut, with an iron tank standing near. Cowler rode alongside it and looked in.

‘More than half-full of water,’ he said, ‘as they told us. This will do us and the horses splendidly, if the “covey” is not too long coming.’

‘How do you know he will call here?’ asked Jack.

‘Well, we can’t be sure, but it’s most likely, as this is the first water after leaving the spring and on the short cut to Moolahalla,’ answered Cowler. ‘It’s so cursed hot he is sure to call for a drink, and, as he had the tank filled, he knows it’s here. He’ll come right enough, but I am afraid he will bring a blasted black boy with him, and that would spoil my plans.’

‘He rides so d——d hard that, on these long journeys,’ said Jack, ‘he nearly always knocks up all but the best horse, and then he leaves the boy behind at the last camp to come on next day with the crawlers, and rides home by night himself.’

‘He’ll wish he hadn’t this time, before I’ve done with him,’ muttered the other savagely. ‘We will bring the bucket inside the hut, so that he is bound to come after it to water his horse. Hobble the nags over that big sandhill out of sight; though, if he should see them, it won’t matter much. He will only think they are out with station-hands.’

We must lie close in the hut, and, directly he rides up and dismounts, bail him up.'

'That's the plan,' laughed Jack, 'it's a good un, and will catch the bird, I make no doubt.'

'It can't fail if he comes in the night, but it's just possible he may smell a rat in the daytime, seeing tracks or something disturbed about the place. He's so devilish fly; yet I choused him finely once.'

'Though he afterwards got the best of you, about your old woman!' said the irrepressible youth.

'It's the first and last time he ever will, and, by God, I'll square it all now and more too.'

'Agreed,' assented Jack. 'I've no love for the proud boss; he's too hard and stand off for my liking. And the captain said we were to get the Star, whatever happened.'

'And so we will, and I'll have my revenge into the bargain,' sulkily answered Cowler. 'Follow my plan, and we will have both horse and man.'

'I'm on,' replied the reckless youngster. 'Now as the nags won't drink any more, I'll short-hobble them in the hollow beyond the rise, where there is always good grass, while you make our camp in the hut.'

From these preparations on the part of this pair of ruffians, it will be seen that Roland Grantley had a warm reception awaiting him, if his unlucky stars led him that way.

## CHAPTER VIII

### 'BAIL UP!'

WE left Grantley and his two native companions in sorry plight at the Marked Tree. About three parts of a bottle of water divided among three thirsty men was not a very copious draught for a hot day in January, after riding for thirty hours without water in a blazing sun. Their horses were so tired and weak that they stopped under each shade,

if allowed, and it became a necessity to stay until the greatest heat of the day had passed. This they did, but, when some hours had elapsed, the animals became so restless that a start was made. They had now a road to follow, and travelling was considerably easier, the jaded horses for a while progressing at a fast walk. Gradually, however, they dropped back to a slow crawl, and again began to halt beneath every miserable tree to seek shelter from the flaming god of day.

As he was leading the Star along a little in advance of the others, Roland noticed a sickening smell, and there, a few yards on one side under a bush, lay one who never more would know the horrors of thirst. Nearly naked, and blackened by the fierce rays of the awful sun, he lay on his back as he had met his death of unutterable anguish. Leaving his startled horse, the squatter stepped to the side of the unfortunate. Yes, he recognised the short form, the partially bald head, and fringe of beard. Only a few weeks before, this man had left Moolahalla to spend his cheque. This had been accomplished with even more than the usual celerity and, while in an incipient stage of *delirium tremens*, he and his fellow-workmen had attempted the long dry stage, only to perish. On the breast of the corpse lay the common silver watch he had worn in life, a certain proof of identification, if any were needed. In that parched, waterless wilderness there was no living thing to feed upon the dead, except the nauseous insect creation. They were the scavengers—they, the withering wind and the scorching sun.

A little distance off the wayfarers came to the carcass of the perished wanderer's horse, its throat having evidently been severed in a vain endeavour to assuage the rider's consuming thirst. Yet a little farther on was stretched the tall form of a man who in life had been of unusual height. In this case all the clothing was cast aside, and the long, spare, sinewy limbs were extended on the dark ground, with the skin drawn tight and hard. The face was all twisted and distorted with the agonies those only can experience who suffer the protracted torment of yielding up their lives to

the demon of thirst unaided and alone in the summer heats of Central Australia.

The two black boys looked and echoed their master's verdict, 'the Thrasher,' the title by which the poor wretch had been known among his boon companions. Near him too lay his horse, which had also been compelled to surrender his blood to his owner's dire need.

To the experienced bushman there was no difficulty in reading the whole story. The lost men did not know the road, and when their thirst came upon them, in their ignorant impatience they believed that most of the journey was traversed. 'Those trees in front are on the water; a good gallop and we shall be there; let us see who can go fastest. . . . None there! Well, to the right, that clump we have missed is on the creek. No sign of water there! Away to that other then! None again!' And now seriously alarmed they race their horses without judgment, until they are exhausted and finally refuse to move. The same amount of exertion, calmly and systematically applied in steadily proceeding straight on, would have enabled them to reach a place of safety. The cool, brave bushman refuses to be flurried himself or to push his horse beyond an easy pace. No delusive groves of stunted trees, magnified into luxuriant beauty by the mocking mirage, entice his stern and steadfast soul from the beaten tracks, and what he knows to be the true direction. So Roland led forward his followers. But now strange fancies seemed fitfully to possess him as he toiled on.

Far in advance on either hand, there appeared to his dis-tempered imagination to be floating two gigantic spectral shapes. Ever, as he slowly progressed, the twain converged. It was by such slow degrees, and yet so surely, that their meeting on the road before him was as certain as death. When they joined, a dread at his heart told him that his fate was sealed. Presently his mood changed, and it even amused him to watch those demoniacal shadowy forms closing in. Every step shortens the distance to the spring; stride on, brave old Star. O for but two hours of unimpaired strength!

how this interminable expanse of plain and floating haze would pass behind, and those menacing horrors that ever drew nearer fade away! Night was coming on, hot, sultry, and oppressive, yet cooler now that the remorseless orb of day had been compelled to sink his scorching face. Was that a whiff of air? The Star opened wide his nostrils and started on with an almost eager spurt. Presently they mounted the Big Sand-Hill, and far away across the wide plain, beyond sight in that mist or dust, lay the haven of rest and safety, the spring.

The great horse snorted with relief, and gathering his strength together broke into a trot. At that triumphant snort of the Star Roland's spirits rose again. Over the confines of the level land to the left and right the apparitions were reluctantly retiring; once nearly shut in by them, the road now showed broad and open. A cool night-breeze whispered hope and joy. On! on! Why suffer longer from this parched throat and distended tongue? The horse struggled from a trot to a canter; the rider yielding himself to the generous impulse of the gallant steed that had so often borne him from the very jaws of death.

The fountain is reached at last, and, plunging in, horse and man realise the delights of nature's most glorious draught. Led on by the Star, the others followed hard after and soon they too were drinking as if their thirst were unquenchable. Then the worn-out beasts were turned loose and the riders sank down and slept for long hours a dreamless sleep. Up rose the sun in all his burning power, but the weary travellers merely staggered to the nearest shade to lie down and continue their sleep. Late in the morning they roused themselves. The horses had come back to the water, and when they had drunk Grantley ordered the boys to take them out to where he knew there was good pasture. His energy was already chafing at the inaction and urging him to finish the journey and get to work again; but until the Star had not only rested, but fed, he felt it would be cruelty to proceed.

Much of the remainder of the day was spent by the blacks

in sleep, while Roland impatiently watched the shadows decrease till the fierce sun drew to the zenith, and then lengthen again tardily as he gradually sank towards the west. Then Ugly Billy was despatched for the Star, and Jollyboy was instructed that they were to remain behind to give the weak horses a spell till the morrow. This was indeed very necessary, for with the exception of his own steed, the horses were in miserable condition and would require nursing to take them through.

'To-morrow night you camp long Bulpura and water yarraman at tank,' said Grantley. 'Then 'nother day pull away Moolahalla. Supposin' Star very much tired, mine camp Bulpura to-night.'

Thus spoke he, little suspecting that no other alternative would be at his disposal. He is indeed playing into the hands of his foes by going forward to-night and calling at Bulpura, the shepherd's hut, where they are awaiting him.

'Plenty dark to-night,' answered Jollyboy, the faithful; 'bale road long Bulpura. Which way make-a-light, bale (no) star, bale whycheuca (moon), plenty mulga.'

Roland smiled; 'All right, Jollyboy, mine bale stupid.'

'You see that one mountain,' said the boy, pointing to a hill three or four miles distant, 'plenty "Mulla" (evil spirits) sit down there; big one dark, that one come up long road catchem you. Mine thinkit you and mine and Billy mate mate (all together) pull away to-morrow. Supposin' you yan (go) to-night you tumble down (die).'

But though Jollyboy was evidently alarmed and persisted in his warnings against the dreaded 'Mulla,' who, according to him, would assuredly be flying about on such a wild night as it promised to be, Grantley was not to be deterred from his purpose. Mounting just as the sun disappeared, he bade his attendants good-night, and the Star set his proud head resolutely homeward with the long even stride that showed he meant business.

'It's going to be a dismal ride, old boy,' soliloquised Grantley, 'and I shall be quite content to meet with no

worse or more unpleasant experience than an encounter with " Mullas," bad as Jollyboy undoubtedly believes them to be.'

He had not proceeded more than five miles when the Star, on rising a low sand-hill, lifted his head with a snort of terror and gazed steadily at something to the left of the track. It was now pitch-dark, so that Roland could distinguish nothing distinctly ; but, urging his horse on, he presently thought he saw a moving object. Then the Star stopped and protested as vehemently as any intelligent animal could against nearer acquaintance with that dim outline ; but his rider was not to be denied, and, rather than force his good steed, dismounted and led him forward. The moment he did so the mystery was solved. The moving, indistinct, shadowy object was suspended from the limb of a tree, and swinging gently to and fro in the strong night-wind that swept across the plain. The dreadful odour, the shape of that long thing drawn black against the dull sky, told beyond a doubt to the traveller's beating heart that he was once more brought directly in contact with death, though in another form. Controlling himself with an effort, Grantley felt for his matches and, striking one, set fire to a few leaves and twigs which lay to his hand. On the ground was some portion of a bushman's swag, his empty ' billy-can ' telling its tale of the torments of thirst. which had culminated in this desperate deed of self-destruction. A couple of straps had served his purpose and he had but to step on that stump to affix the end to the projecting branch.

As he grasped these details, his eyes wandered in spite of him to the distorted face ; just then the fire flickered and failed. With a shudder Roland leapt on his horse and rode away. The road seemed strewn with dead men, each more awful and repulsive than the last ; he would look no more, nay he would even avoid the first indications of such another gruesome scene. Why had he not obeyed the impulse of the horse and turned from that appalling sight ? Unstrung for the time, he shut his eyes and trusted entirely to the good

animal he bestrode. It was not for long, however ; the weakness passed off, and the resolute spirit resumed its sway.

To take advantage of the short cut, he had now to leave the track, scarcely distinguishable in the thick darkness, and strike for the tank so often mentioned at Bulpura Hut, for the purpose of watering his horse.

‘ You shall have a drink there, my boy,’ he said, ‘ if we are only clever enough to find it in this impenetrable blackness, and it shan’t be my fault if we don’t.’

Carefully noting the lie of the ground and each tree he passed sufficiently close to observe, and keeping the wind on his cheek for an hour, he felt confident of having continued in the right direction so far. Then the breeze smote him on the other cheek after dying away for a space ; and again it came as before, only to veer round to every quarter of the heavens, till it finally died away into absolute stillness.

For a considerable time he felt positive he was keeping the correct course, though the contour of the country was not such as he anticipated, although it seemed familiar to him. Expecting every moment now to come across some object he would recognise, he proceeded, till suddenly the hoof of the Star rattled on the skeleton of a sheep and again on another. Immediately alighting and groping about, Roland soon discovered the bones of several rams, and knew that he was at a salt well, where a number of old animals had perished, two miles from the hut and tank he sought. Sitting reflectively on an old skeleton, it took him, however, many minutes to determine in which direction they lay. Having accomplished this, he once more started, taking infinite pains to keep straight, and at length had the satisfaction of arriving at the desired spot. Riding up to the tank, he sprang to the ground, only to find the bucket gone. It should be in the hut of course, and, hanging the rein over a post, he went to fetch it. There it was, at the open door ; but as he stooped to pick it up, a rasping voice that sent a thrill through every fibre, said in the usual bush-ranging vernacular—



‘Bail up, or I’ll blow your b——y head off!’ and the cold rim of a pistol touched his forehead.

‘No use, Mr. Grantley,’ said another voice beside him. ‘You must give in this time’; and he felt a handcuff close on one wrist.

Even in that moment of startled surprise the instinct of resistance rose strong within him. With the disengaged hand he dashed the levelled revolver aside, the weapon going off harmlessly in the air. Then he fiercely struggled to escape to his horse, but the two ruffians clung to him and, though he dragged them some yards, he was eventually overpowered and the second handcuff clasped on his other arm. The tussle had been garnished with the choicest oaths that bush blackguardism delights in, but there were still left in that extensive vocabulary numerous foul expressions to hurl at the captive when a fire was lighted and he was brought into the building.

Roland’s stout heart quailed when he recognised Cowler; the other robber was nearly a stranger. He at once saw that it was a premeditated and carefully planned thing, and that the men were a part of the Warrigo band. These too were his own handcuffs, lost on the Paroo Road, and by some strange freak of fortune found by the desperadoes and used to chain himself. Cowler caught his glance and divined his thought.

‘How do you like them?’ he sneered. ‘They seem to fit you as well as another man, fine gentleman as you think yourself.’

Grantley did not answer. He had been placed at the far end of the small room so that there could be no chance of his reaching the door by a desperate rush. It was evident the bushrangers did not intend sleeping for the rest of the night. After talking for a while, the elder growing more ill-tempered with taunting in vain the silent prisoner, the two began disputing regarding their movements in the morning.

‘You were to do what you liked with the boss,’ said the younger ruffian, ‘but I was to take the Star to the captain.’

'No,' retorted Cowler, 'you go and tell him I am bringing the horse when I've done with the man.'

'You can complete that little job without the Star; take one of the others.'

'No, I won't; I am going to take him a goodish bit from here and it's part of my plan to take the horse too.'

'What do you mean to do with him? I don't like killing in cold blood, except it's the b——y police; then it's well enough.'

'I'm not going to kill him, I tell you,' retorted Cowler; 'I want to frighten him a bit, to pay him out for his stuck-up ways.'

'I don't mind that, and the captain gave me no orders about him. To settle about the Star, I'll play you ante-up who shall take him.'

With an oath at the other's obstinacy, Cowler consented and the game began. At first, fortune or skill appeared to be nearly evenly balanced, but, as the play progressed, the younger man proved no match for his more experienced adversary. The end came and the winner rose.

'Maybe you are satisfied now,' he snarled, 'and will do what you ought to have done before.'

'And what may that be?' cried the young fellow, an angry spot showing on each cheek.

'Mind your own business and leave me to mind mine,' was the surly reply.

'I shall be glad to part company with you anyhow, and, if the horse doesn't turn up at the camp, I'll leave you to fight it out with the captain.'

'He'll turn up right enough,' said Cowler, 'and as daylight's breaking, you'd better get the nags, while I boil the billy.'

The necessity for exertion restored the usual amicable relations between the comrades, and the youth immediately started to fetch the horses, leaving his companion to guard the captive and prepare their breakfast. Roland had sunk into a disturbed slumber, from which he was not roused until

the Star’s loud neigh, as he welcomed his mates, reverberated through the building. Then looking through an aperture in the slabbing of the wall, he saw two of his own station hacks being brought up by the young bushranger.

‘ A pair of the best goers on the run,’ he muttered ; ‘ these gentry appear to be making very free, not only with my person, but my property also. Well, perhaps my turn will come ’ ; and his glance at Mr. Cowler did not augur well for that worthy’s future happiness, if it ever did.

The two rogues now sat down to their morning meal, the younger placing some food before Grantley and telling him with a not unfriendly grin that it was his own once and he was quite welcome to it now.

With the mere instinct of his training the prisoner thanked him, and this somewhat seemed to touch Jack, for he became quite assiduous in his hospitable intentions, though the other watched his movements with scowling disapproval. The meal over, preparations were made for instant departure, each horse being saddled in turn, while a strict guard was kept on the captive.

Then, still handcuffed, he was ordered to mount the Star, Cowler holding the horse by the bridle.

The latter then got into his own saddle, and, with a word of farewell to his companion, took his way in towards the river.

Young Jack moved off rapidly in the direction of the road leading up the Darling, whistling a gay air as he went, as if there were not even a remote possibility of the gallows closing his brief career.

## CHAPTER IX

### MIOLA AND HER MASTER

To say that Grantley, alone in the power of this remorseless villain, did not feel much apprehension regarding his position, would be far from the truth. It even struck him like

the loss of a friend to see the thoughtless, graceless young outlaw depart and leave him with the man, whom of all the world he had the most reason to dread.

'Now, boss,' said the scoundrel, 'let's understand each other. If you make the least attempt to escape, I'll put this bullet through your stuck-up head. Perhaps you think you might gallop off, if you could get the Star away from me, and as I thought it possible you would try, I've got this rope fastened to your irons and will tie it round my horse's neck. There, I believe that settles your chance. You're a deep one, but I am too fly to give you a show.'

Roland had indeed entertained the idea of driving his heels into the Star's sides, and with a shout urging him into a gallop in some unguarded moment, when the robber's hold on the line was loose. Once free, with a few yards' start, he was confident his good steed would carry him safely home without guiding reins. Of course there was the risk of being shot at the first movement, but he was nerved to hazard that.

The cunning rogue had, however, rendered this plan quite impracticable by tying him to his own horse, since to separate the two was to be flung incontinently to the ground and perhaps killed. Another mode of escape must be devised, but nothing presented itself to the mind of the anxious squatter.

Meantime the bushranger steered his course lower down the river and shortly came into low-lying, polygonum ground with a thick forest of box-trees growing over it. Continuing on until the undergrowth was close, he came to a spreading tree in a little clear space.

'The very place,' he muttered, and at once drew up the horses. Dismounting, he unloosed the line from his animal's neck, and holding it in one hand and a pistol in the other, roughly ordered Grantley to 'get off.' Then flinging the rope over a limb he pulled the prisoner's hands-over-head to the full length of his arms, and tied them there in such a manner that for him to release himself was simply impossible. That done, he stepped in front of his enemy.

‘ Now, Mr. Grantley, when last we parted I swore that I would pay you out for not only foiling me in my revenge, but for every one of your many insulting words. You would chain me up with the very handcuffs you wear now and flog me, would you ? Ah ! ah ! it ’s grand ! Yes, I swore I would tie you up in the back-country for the crows to eat, and I am as good as my word ; I see there are a few about already. I ’d done a bit of bushranging before I tried to knock that little devil on the head, but I went back to it on purpose to get this opportunity at you. I meant to do it all along, but if I had told that soft young fool of a pal of mine, he might have split, so I put him off by saying I only meant to frighten you. Ha ! ha ! There couldn’t be a nicer place for the job ; no one ever comes this way ; it ’s real beautiful. I don’t like to leave you, but I must tear myself away. First, though, I ’ll hang the keys of the irons in front of you on this twig, just to vex you ; wouldn’t you like to get at them ? ’

‘ You devil ! ’ said Grantley through his set teeth.

‘ Take care or you may provoke me to shoot you. I would enjoy a pop at you to leave my mark on your carcass, but it might be heard and so spoil sport. Now I ’ll say good-bye, and I hope the crows will enjoy your company as much as I have. Ha ! ha ! ha ! I ’ll come back some day to see your bones.’

And the monster strode to where the horses were fastened. He had just seized hold of the animal he had ridden, when the Star gave a loud snort, plunged back, breaking the rein attaching him to the bush, and immediately galloped off, evidently thinking that liberties enough had been taken with him. With a bitter execration, the robber sprang on his horse, and followed at full speed. A gleam of hope shot into Roland’s despairing soul at the sight. He knew well that now his gallant steed was fairly at liberty he would not be caught, and, when once seen at the station with a saddle on and riderless, the tracks would be run back and he would be liberated.

The question was, how long would they be ? If the Star

went straight home the probabilities were in favour of his being seen during the day, but if the villain gave up the pursuit and the horse fell in with the station mob, he might stay with them and not be found till next morning. There was the certainty of his being missed, when Billy and Jolly-boy arrived, but he had told them to stay one night at the tank, and they could not reach Moolahalla until late on the morrow, perhaps too late to find him before night fell. He felt that by that time he might succumb. No, his best hope was in the Star being discovered.

It was, of course, very possible that the bushranger would return and finish him, but as the day wore on this apprehension passed off, and he became more confident of ultimate rescue. He was fortunately in the shade, and for a time the discomfort did not trouble him much, but the one posture gradually grew irksome, and then all but intolerable. When night fell he was hanging on his fetters for very weariness, almost regardless of the pain they caused his wrists, while just before him, not three feet away, hung the key that would unlock those links, if he could but grasp it from that tantalising twig.

It was now evident the Star had not gone home, and doubts as to whether he had escaped the bushranger began to torture the unhappy captive. Well, at the worst, he had but to await the arrival of the two black boys. He would face even that long delay, and live to be avenged on the diabolical scoundrel who had left him to suffer thus. Yes, he would follow him up, and either slay him with his own hand, or hand him over to the police, to expiate his crimes on the gallows.

Thus summoning his bold spirit to his aid, he bore with fortitude the dreadful pangs that racked his frame through that interminable night. At last day broke, and now his thirst had become a torture; but, buoyed up by the hope that a few more hours at most must bring succour, he continued to endure with a stern, impassive courage all his own.

He had need of it all, for only just above his head sounded the ominous caw-caw-caw of the foul black carrion-crow of Australia, waiting for the end to tear out the sufferer's eyes. Roland understood what the signal meant, and, as others gathered for the expected feast, up in the blue sky, through the sparse foliage of the tree, he could distinguish a moving, circling speck. It was the great eagle-hawk, which, with its keen sight, already espied the helpless prey. Roland shuddered, and nerved his stout heart anew.

When morning light appeared at the head station there was a stir at the native camp. The milking cows had not been found the previous evening, and Mr. Hazle had cut up very rusty at the prospect of no milk for breakfast. The old gentleman had, indeed, intimated his unalterable determination to visit his displeasure upon the entire black sisterhood, unless the bovine dispensers of the snowy fluid he loved occupied their accustomed places in the bails, and provided sufficient for his early coffee. Miola, the head dairymaid, had trusted to others for the usual bringing-in and shutting-up of the calves, and this had, consequently, not been done at all. As a natural consequence, when darkness fell with the cows still roaming at their own sweet will over the fenceless wilderness, there seemed small prospect of those empty pans being replenished by the ordinary breakfast hour. Now, Miola was a very privileged person, and knew perfectly well that, so far as she was individually concerned, Mr. Hazle's bark was not only worse than his bite, but that there would be absolutely no bite at all for her. But those cows were away, and must be discovered and brought back, if only that she might triumphantly hand the milk round as if nothing unusual had occurred.

Miss Miola was, moreover, a very self-assertive and even aggressive young woman among her own people ; and though her voice was so sweet and low in the abodes of civilisation, as represented by the home-station, it could rise to quite a high key and attain to even a strident tone on occasion in native wrangles.

On ascertaining the failure of her satellites over-night, she had vented her displeasure at great length and with considerable spirit—to such effect, indeed, that at the earliest dawn the whole camp was astir, and wives, mothers, and daughters were despatched to the north, south, east, and west by the imperious mistress of the dairy department.

She herself started out at great speed, accompanied by a little sister, to the most distant point where the wandering animals were likely to have strayed. For nearly an hour she led on, keenly searching the ground with her large, bright eyes for their tracks. There was no sign of them, however, and she was about to turn back, believing the milkers must be in another direction, when across a plain, in some bushes, there appeared several moving objects. These were not the milking cows, she decided at the first glance, but something that drove them at once out of her curly pate.

It was a mob of horses, and among them one she could never mistake. It was but for a moment, but she had caught a glimpse of the well-known white star, and surely that was the glint of something on the back of the owner of that bright mark. On went the girl with redoubled speed; and then there could be no doubt. It was the Star, with the station mob of horses, the saddle still on his back and the bridle on his head; but where was the rider?

If Miola was anything she was prompt.

‘You go back,’ she said to her sister, ‘and tell them at the station that the Star is here, and perhaps Mr. Grantley is lying killed somewhere. I’ll try to find the tracks and run them back.’

It was of no use the little girl saying she was afraid to return by herself; the imperative maiden would listen to nothing, and bundled her off in double-quick time. The irate Hazle might whistle for his coffee, or drink it without milk; all that she now thought of was the position of her master, the man she considered the first of either whites or blacks. The place where she stood was just about in the direct line from the out-station hut and tank, on the short



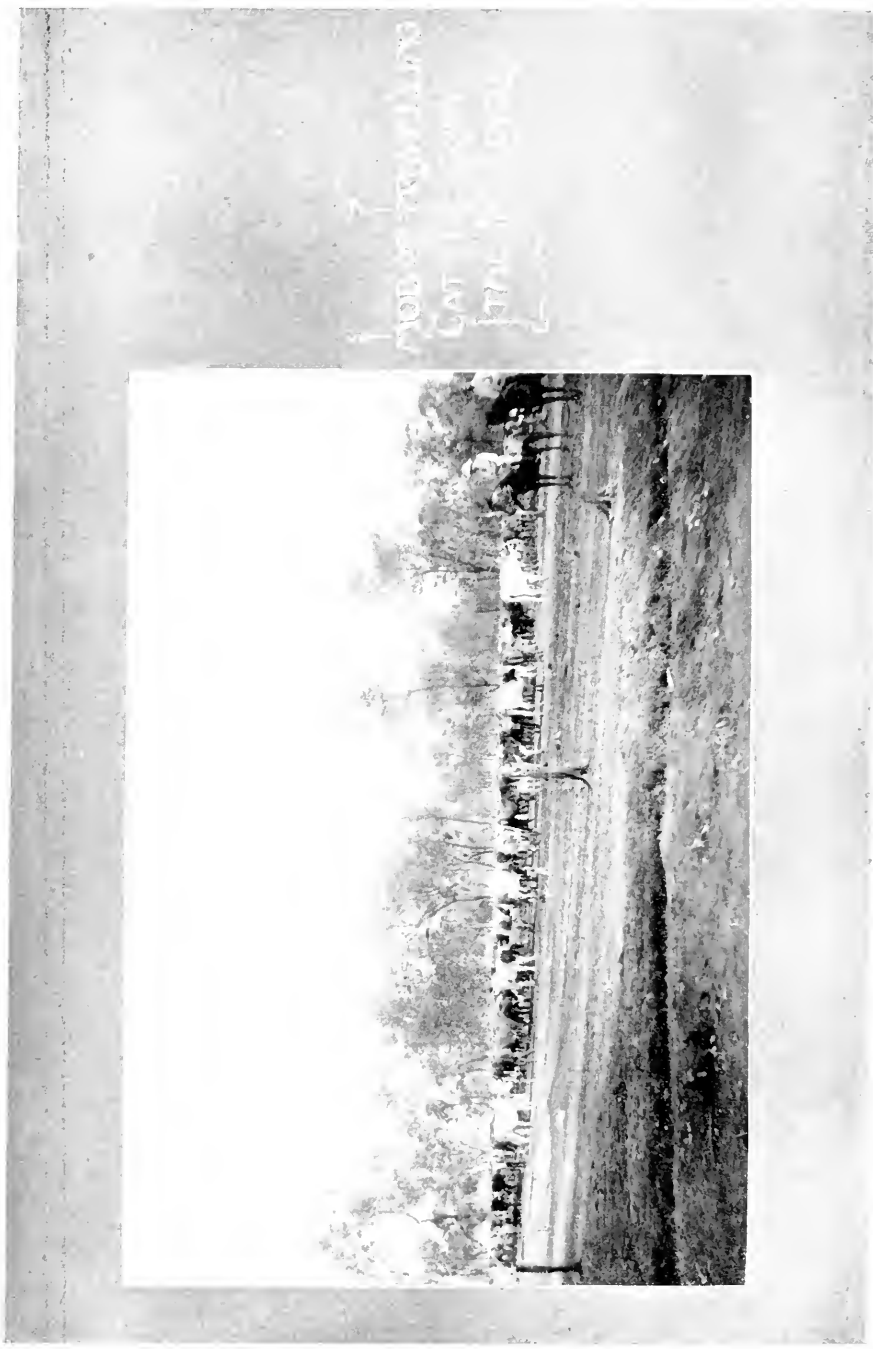


PHOTO: H. J. WALTON



cut from the Paroo road across country to Moolahalla, and therefore near where the Star had probably come in.

To ascertain this she walked up parallel with the river for two miles, and at last cut his tracks. There was no mistaking that round, firm tread, especially as she, like most of the natives, knew the hoof-marks of almost every working horse and dairy cow on the station. Such knowledge saves them many a weary mile's walk, as they then know at once when they find a trail if it is that of the animal they seek. If it is, they follow it up; if not, they pass on in further search.

Miola, therefore, was quite confident she had found the clue, and, hanging her neckerchief on a stick, which she forced into the ground, she rapidly traced the trail out. She knew the waving signal would quickly catch the tracker's sight, and that they would at once understand it was the starting-point, and make for it. That done, they would quickly overtake and relieve her of the responsibility of running the trail. Until then she must continue on, like the brave girl she was.

There were no difficulties, as the horse's hoofs were deeply imprinted in the yielding soil; but presently she was surprised to see the tracks of two animals, and stopped to discover where the newcomer had gone. It was easy to see that both horses had galloped, the Star in front, while the other, she promptly divined, had been ridden in pursuit of him. Once she observed where he had crossed before and the Star had passed over his footprints, conclusively proving that there had been a chase. She saw, too, where the pursuit had been abandoned and the horseman had turned away at right angles up the river.

Satisfied of the correctness of these conclusions, and full of apprehension, Miola hastened on more anxiously than before. The trail was now more marked by the fact of both horses having passed along, and much of the way she could run. It was now low-lying box country, covered generally with thick 'lignum, through which it was impossible to see

many yards. Her heart beat quickly as she thought of the dreaded Mullas ; perhaps she had better go back to the open and wait till the men came from the station. No, it was daylight, and the ancient enemies of her people had long ago retired to their mountain fastnesses ; she would go through this close place to the high open land beyond.

Resolutely pressing on, she suddenly came out into a small clearing ; and there, half-standing and half-hanging by his arms, was the man she sought. At first she thought him dead ; then a slight movement caught her quick eye, and she rushed to him.

‘ Miola ! ’ he whispered wonderingly. ‘ Water ! ’

‘ No water here,’ she answered.

Then she sprang at the rope with hot haste, tore the knot loose, and he sank to the ground. Those eyes of hers that took in everything had seen the key, and in a moment the fetters were unlocked and the lacerated wrists and numbed hands at liberty. It was hardly done, when the quick beat of horses’ hoofs was heard, and Mr. Hazle, with a couple of black boys, appeared on the scene.

‘ Water ! ’ cried Miola, as she rushed to meet them, and seized the canvas bag, filled with the cool liquid, which one of the riders held out to her. Grantley drank, and revived with surprising rapidity.

‘ Have you seen anything of that d——d scoundrel, Dan Cowler ? ’ he demanded of Hazle.

‘ Not for the last three days,’ was the reply. ‘ He and his gang left us then, after sticking up the station.’

‘ I understand it all now,’ said Roland, and apparently dismissed the subject from his mind.

He was very stiff and suffering much pain, but after moving about a little, felt sufficiently revived to mount the Star, which Mr. Hazle had brought with him, and ride slowly home. Like the true native of youthful years, Miola, as soon as Mr. Hazle was in charge, had shrunk back ; but her master insisted on her being put on one of the trackers’ horses, telling him to walk.

‘I am not going to forget so soon that it was she who got me down from that cursed tree and saved me from further torture, if not from death,’ he said ; and with a few warm words he praised and thanked her, until the white teeth glistened and the great eyes glowed with pride.

## CHAPTER X

## THE LAST OF THE PARKINGEES

DURING the ride to the Homestead little more was said, and that entirely referred to station matters. On arrival, Roland ate a light breakfast, and sank into a heavy sleep, which continued for the remainder of the day and far into the night. When he awoke, he appeared to be light-headed, and Hazle feared a serious illness would supervene ; but the strong constitution and wiry frame, inured to every hardship, triumphed, and the next day the squatter assumed his wonted place as if nothing had happened out of the ordinary course. He made no reference to his sufferings, giving his orders with the same concise calmness as before ; but each individual on the station was well aware that a day of reckoning would come for Mr. Cowler, otherwise he would be fortunate indeed.

All pressing work having been attended to, Hazle was asked for particulars of the robbery. With grim humour, Grantley smiled at the story of the selection of the horses by the bushrangers.

‘A neighbourly sort of thing,’ he said, ‘to save your own animal at the expense of your friend.’

‘Self-preservation is the first law of nature, my boy, and you know quite well,’ returned Hazle, ‘that your generosity would never have allowed me to lose a horse while acting for you—you would certainly have insisted on my accepting another in exchange ; however, I preferred keeping my own, and that gallant outlaw, Captain Thunderbolt, was pleased to allow it. Probably, if the gentle thief meets me under

other circumstances, he will appropriate the animal without the slightest compunction.'

'And blow the owner's brains out into the bargain, possibly,' retorted Grantley.

'I believe he might have done that on the first impulse, when we last met, if I had professed the slightest interest in the matter ; but nobody cares to kill a fellow who asks him to do it.'

For many weeks subsequent to this there were many reports current of stations being stuck up and of robberies of the mails by the same gang, but in each case these events took place far from Moolahalla. Though Grantley said nothing about it, he was in constant communication with the police, and was anxiously hoping that the desperadoes would approach near enough for him to join in the pursuit. No such opportunity was afforded him, however, and suddenly all sign of the band was lost. They were said to have left the country altogether, or at least to have gone to another colony, but Roland felt confident nothing of the kind had occurred.

'They will turn up at our very door when we least expect it some day,' he observed to a police-officer ; ' meantime, I have little doubt they are lying quiet in some out-of-the-way place in the back-country. I know of half-a-dozen where they may be now. When the rain comes, they will make it lively for you.'

And, after weary waiting, the blessed rain came at length—not in a sudden storm or gentle saturating showers, but in one unbroken pour, lasting three days and nights. Lakes never known to be filled before in the memory of the white man, and scarcely in that of the black, were full to overflowing now. Creeks, billabongs—nay, even the great chasm where the noble river itself used to run—were flowing strong with the mere local deluge. The very plains themselves, but a few hours before hard, dry, and baked, so that they seemed to contain as little moisture as ashes straight from the fire, were now as soft and dripping as a wet sponge. Dormant

nature sprang into active, buoyant, and luxurious life. Countless myriads of water-fowl were spread over the waters, and began to bring forth and multiply ; and not they alone, but the whole feathered tribe were to be seen and heard by day or by night as their habit is ; alone, in pairs, or in countless thousands of the same species, they spread wherever the traveller passed. Animal life, too, abounded once more. The small bush-rats swept over the country like a wave and honeycombed the sandhills. Whence they came, or how, in such an inconceivably short space of time, they covered the land, was a mystery. Other strange four-legged creatures, tiny and curious, were to be seen daily, in addition to the better-known denizens of the bush, all bearing their part in universal rejoicing at the prodigality of the great mother.

Inanimate nature rushed into luxuriant, if brief, existence. Plants shot through the soil, grew, bloomed, and faded in a day ; herbs and grasses of the field clothed the lately arid plains and barren sandhills with such lavish loveliness as to fill the mind with wonder and admiration ; perfumes loaded the air until the sense of smell was wearied and oppressed. The bushes and trees reared their heads anew and darted out from the bare and leafless boughs new and vigorous shoots, which dressed them in brightest verdure and richest foliage. Nature was robing herself like a bride decked for her wedding.

Insect-life, perhaps, showed the most astounding increase : they flew, they crawled, in the blazing and sweltering heat of noonday, during the darkest night, or on the coldest morning ; they were ever present to torture, annoy, or disgust. Yet the beauty and diversity of their colours and forms must have extorted the unbounded admiration of an entomologist, even in the midst of his sufferings and exasperation.

The flocks and herds grew sleek and lazy ; they had but to open their mouths and fill them with earth's richest pasturage and all the choicest luxuries that the most fastidious brute could desire.

Roland, from the commencement, had been out in the heavy rain, assiduously directing the movements of his flocks.

With a master's eye he saw for himself, and then issued instructions; the consequence being that, when the deluge was over, the losses were but slight, and it took but little trouble to collect the liberated sheep again.

He appeared early one morning at the head station when the rain had ceased, on foot, wet and weary, but imperturbable as ever.

'Had you a good time?' asked Hazle, with a grim smile at his bedraggled aspect.

'I haven't suffered for want of water, at any rate,' he answered. 'The opportunity has been afforded me of absorbing it at every pore for the last three days.'

'It will bring a big flood,' said Hazle, 'and then look out that your jumbucks are not caught on the low land and drowned.'

'You are a very Nestor, wise even beyond your venerable years,' replied Grantley.

'You be blowed!' retorted the other in high dudgeon. 'A man can't express a common-sense opinion without your bristles showing. I wouldn't have such a beastly temper for all your stations; I'd rather be poor and amiable.'

'I am sorry you are poor, old man,' said Roland; 'but as to being amiable, I would not have you that for the world. It's only your infernal temper that renders you endurable.'

'It's something to be endurable under any conditions or circumstances,' growled Hazle; 'its more than several of my acquaintances are. Miola, which one big fellow sulky, Mr. Grantley or mine?'

'You are the worst,' answered that downright young damsel in perfect English; 'all the blacks say so. They say you are a very cross old man.'

'Why, I have not sworn for a week, ever since the rain began; I thought it might stop if I did, and then your angelic master would have made more noise than the thunder.'

'Yes, you have,' she replied; 'you swore horribly when Big Jemmy let you drop in the mud, the day he tried to carry you to the boat.'



‘Tried to carry me!’ he roared; ‘why, d—— it, he let me down on purpose. Instead of a little mild swearing, your good-tempered boss here would have flogged him black and blue if he had been dropped flop as I was.’

‘Well, here are your clothes, as clean as ever,’ said the smiling maid, ‘so it does not matter.’

‘Ah, you are a good girl!’ said the mollified old gentleman. ‘Some day I will buy you a frock, to make you look pretty.’

But Miola was gone, without paying the slightest attention to his last words. She was too much accustomed to look to Grantley, as the only employer she acknowledged, for all her requirements, to regard other people’s promises.

‘She’s a deuced useful girl,’ observed Hazle, ‘and her only failing is that she thinks a lot too much of you. I really don’t believe she would leave the station even to please me.’

‘It’s quite extraordinary, isn’t it?’ said Roland drily, ‘considering she is about as well off here, and her people too, as they could hope to be anywhere.’

A few days later, Grantley took his way to the big Sand Hill lagoon to inspect the patriarchs and progenitors of his flocks. Hazle accompanied him, and, as they strolled the short two miles to the yard, their conversation fell on the customs and past history of the aborigines.

‘It is generally supposed,’ remarked Grantley, ‘that the aborigines of Australia have no legends or traditions; but this is not quite correct, as I have heard fragments of several. On one of my excursions out back some of my black shepherds showed me, on what they said was the site of an old camp, a number of helmets made of burnt gypsum, which had been made into hard and durable cement. They said these were the remains of Mulla headgear. I was greatly puzzled as to what could have been their use, because, though too small to fit on any head of the usual size, they were very heavy. I pushed my inquiries, but the natives were extremely reticent, and referred me to old Jerry; and to-day I am going to question

him. They, at the same time, stated that a figure shaped like a Mulla, and made of a similar cement to the helmets, was lying hid not far distant from the old camp where they affirmed their ancient enemies perished. I made two young fellows accompany me to search, but in vain ; and I have never been able to find it, or indeed the helmets, since, and can only suppose the niggers have hidden them also. Here is the yard, and there comes the ancient savage, who " can a tale unfold " if I can but loosen his tongue ! '

He was an old man, bent, gnarled, and twisted like one of his native box-trees, with not one ounce of superfluous flesh upon his frame. His head was of the true aboriginal type, with its low, receding, animal brow, from which the heavy, tangled elf-locks hung, innocent of the touch of comb or brush. In the cavities beneath, all that was left of the light of the eyes had to penetrate through a liquid ooze of dirt and corruption. All expression, unless under unwonted excitement, had long since fled—one might almost have said, all intelligence ; but a little still lingered in the nearly sightless orbs, or occasionally lighted up the dark, ill-favoured lineaments of the last chief of the Parkingees. The once beautifully strong white teeth had decayed with his strength, leaving but a few blackened fangs to supply their place. His cheeks were covered with a short, tufted, and coarse beard and a thick coating of dirt, the accumulation of years, through which the slimy overflow from the watery eyes had worn small creeks. The long thin arms terminated in bony fingers, with strong hooked nails, like a bird's talons. His legs and feet were so wasted as to show each bone and muscle, and bent and tottered in carrying even his attenuated frame. Yet in this human ruin there still remained something of the nobleness of his prime, for the broad shoulders and thin flanks showed he had once been lithe and active as the fleetest kangaroo.

In this sketch some will doubtless imagine they detect exaggeration ; but, if so, they cannot have seen the aboriginal of Australia in the last stage of decrepitude and misery, when all the joys of his merely animal existence have flown, leaving

him, however, still clinging to life through the mere base brute-fear of death.

Leaning upon his spear, the old savage crept up to the side of the squatter, who had just finished counting his rams, and, first carefully brushing away all possible burrs with the sole of his horny foot, then jobbing a hole with the point of his weapon, he solemnly sat in it with a grunt of satisfaction. After which he felt in his mane-like hair, and, producing a short black pipe, he pressed a finger into the bowl as a practical illustration of its emptiness, and uttered the word 'Bacca.' Grantley looked down at the old beggar with an amused, quizzical expression on his hard, self-reliant face, and answered, as he gave him a small piece of the coveted weed—

'Not three days have passed away since your weekly allowance was given out. Old man, you cannot have smoked it yet; why lie to your master? Don't forget that his hand holds a whip, his foot wears a boot!'

'Walcoro has not lied; he smokes to forget he is the white man's slave—to obey his nod and tremble at his word. Can he forget the whip or the boot when his body is still sore?'

'You have forgotten that your head is white and that the lubras have beguiled thee, old idiot!'

'I know that my head is like the flour-bag, and my blood runs cold and thin. What care I for the women of my people? Have not my lubras withered at the touch of the white man? Behold, I am like yon tree your hand has spared, all but dead and alone!'

The scoff on the lip of the squatter gave way to a more serious expression as he replied—

'Why curse my people? They but follow their destiny. It is fated that the land must be theirs, and that your race must succumb to mine.'

'Then grudge not the few pleasures the black man covets. His old men shepherd your flocks; his young men ride your horses, herd your cattle, and obey your commands; the

women await your slightest behest like slaves, and live and die in your service. The white man is rich, but he is a niggard, and gives little in return for all this.'

'Insatiable old villain! Does he not feed and clothe you, and, above all, submit to the endless complaints of grumblers such as you, when he might gag you?'

'The black man once roamed these plains, free as yonder eagle. He hunted at his will the emu, kangaroo, wallaby, and opossum. He netted the ducks and fish where and when he would. Now your cattle cover the whole land, and you say they must not be disturbed by the step of the hunter of my people. We, who once fought and conquered the fierce Mullas, now dare not leave the banks of our river for fear of the anger of our master! The curse of the dying Mullas is upon us!'

'Old man, I weary of all this drivel. Cease to dwell upon the ancient glories of your race, the past happiness, present misery, or future extinction. Tell me the tale of the vengeance of the Parkingees on the Mullas. I have seen the place of their slaughter and the copija helmets they made to cover their doomed heads. But where is the image of their great chief? Your young men have told me it is hid near the bank of the Big Milca Lake.'

The old warrior started from the ground with something of the vigour of his lost youth, and, with fury shaking his aged limbs, broke out—

'Accursed be the tongue that ever tells the stranger the secret hiding-place of the Idol of the Mullas, and blasted be the eye that discovers it!'

'You may keep your secret, though I know the image exists, or else my black boys lie; but tell me the story of the destruction of the people!'

The old man looked half-incredulously in Grantley's face, as if he feared he was mocking him, hesitated for a moment, and then, again leisurely seating himself, began.

But his narrative must be deferred to another chapter.

## CHAPTER XI

## THE DOOM OF THE MULLAS

‘LISTEN, master. I am very old, and I have seen many winters ; but my father was older when he told me the tale you shall hear, and he said two generations had then passed away since the slaughter of the hated race, the dreaded enemies of the Parkingees. The Mullas were then a great tribe, possessing all the country from the Warrego to the Peri Mountains and far beyond the Paroo ; but they most loved to camp at Mount Undelcarra, near a small spring that then bubbled up at the back of the hill. It sometimes failed at the end of a long, dry summer, and I will tell you how this led to their destruction.

‘They were a race of pigmies, with long arms that reached to their feet, but fierce and active as any warrior of the Parkingees. At their elbows was a bone like a tomahawk, sharp and strong, and with this they struck backwards with the force of a horse’s kick. Only the men had it ; the women were weaponless, with long red hair which clothed them like a blanket. They dwelt always in the rocks of the mountains, only venturing down into the plains after dark to kill any single traveller of my people ; for they were cowards, and dared not meet a warrior in open fight.

‘This went on until the bones of many Parkingees bleached on their hunting-grounds around the camps. At last they surprised several of our women fishing, and, after killing two of the old lubras, they escaped to their mountain, taking with them the sweetest flower of the whole tribe and the pride of her people, the young bride of Barpoo, the brave chief, whose hand was ever foremost in war, whose back no foe had ever seen.

‘When he heard the tale that Wanda had been stolen two days before, well knew he then what her fate had been, and that never more he should behold her alive ; but he uttered no wailing word then, only his hand shook as he grasped his

spear. Dark was the scowl on his face, and fiercely glowed the lightning in his eyes, as his voice rose amid the assembled warriors, finding an echo in each heart, for who had not lost a son, brother, wife, or friend at the hands of the accursed Mullas?

“How long, O men of the Parka, will you sit down and be a prey to the enemies of your race? How many more of your young men will die the death of trapped emus and their blood run into the dust, almost at your very camps? How many more of your maidens will ye suffer to be taken out of your midst to be toyed with and jeered at around the fires of your foes, till they weary and slay them? These cry for vengeance and we are silent. There is a spell on the hearts of the Parkingees, or the skulls of their stricken ones would never blacken over the smokes of their murderers. Arm—be no longer a derision to your enemies and a reproach to the fathers who begat you. My Wanda is dead, the victim of the Mullas, but her spirit shall be appeased by the blood of their whole people. Up and away, collect every fighting man, let us encircle the camping-ground of our foes on the rocks of Undelcarra before the rays of another sun light up the trees upon its brow. For theirs shall be no warrior's death, but by famine and thirst let them perish from before the children of the Parka. Away! the spirits of our slain friends beckon us on to the vengeance that shall be told from sire to son while a Parkingee walks the earth.”

‘One fierce, exultant shout arose from the assembled multitude, and fleet runners were at once despatched to call in the hunting parties. At nightfall over five hundred men had collected, weapons in hand, and in full war-paint, eager to be led against the foe.

‘Barpoo divided them into three bands, with instructions that each was to approach the Mullas' camp from a different direction until within about half a mile, when they were to spread out into a circle and so surround them, and then close in, taking advantage of the cover of every tree, bush, and rock.

‘ It was a long march, fully twenty miles ; but the active savages rapidly traversed the distance, and executed each movement so silently and successfully that the fated Mullas suspected nothing of their approach until day broke, showing the line of the Parkingees completely encircling them. Great was the commotion that ensued, but during the day no attempts were made to dislodge the attacking force. When night had fairly set in, however, a sudden storm of stones fell upon the lower and more exposed side of the line, followed by a furious charge of the Mullas. They were met as they advanced by a thick flight of boomerangs that shook their ranks, and then by a wall of spears that drove them back amidst the taunts of their triumphant foes.

‘ The Mullas used no casting weapons ; they simply threw stones, and, at a distance, were comparatively contemptible opponents to the well-armed Parkingees. But, once at close quarters, they invariably proved themselves formidable antagonists, as they plied the bone-axes upon their elbows with terrible effect. On this occasion, however, they utterly failed to penetrate the hedge of spears, and retreated without having slain more than three or four of the river-men. Apparently disheartened by their want of success, they made no further attempt to escape for some days, in spite of the jeers of the Parkingees, who took advantage of their enemies’ supineness to strengthen their own position.

‘ The camp of the Mullas was arranged among the rocks of a rugged mount that rose abruptly from a small plain about two hundred yards from a low sandhill. Near to this was the little spring, the only water they had to depend on, and that was already rapidly diminishing. Of food there remained a considerable supply, but not sufficient to sustain their numbers above a week without suffering. To obtain more was impossible, unless they could force the bristling circle. Of this they were conscious there was little hope, as each day augmented the array of their opponents.

‘ As the horrors of the situation became evident to the doomed race, they repeated their endeavours to break through

and fly, though each was more vain and hopeless than the last. Their relentless persecutors hurled them back at the point of the spear, with the pitiless resolve of savages, with whom vengeance is the predominant idea. They could see the smoke-dried skeletons of the captured women of their tribe hanging to the trees over the fires of the hated Mullas, and the sight nerved them in their stern resolve to destroy the whole people.

‘Barpoo, too, could distinguish his butchered bride, stretched between two of the tallest saplings. He knew her by the gaily crimsoned opossum-skin cloak he had made and painted for her. In derision the fierce Mullas had hung it above his darling’s body. Day by day the terrible object met his sight, but it never hastened his revenge. He well knew his prey was in his power, and, though his eyes flashed and his form shook with suppressed passion, his determination never wavered that her murderers should feel the utmost extremities of torment ere their death, without the abatement of a pang and unshortened by an hour or even a moment.

‘As the days grew hotter and the nights more close and sultry, he never seemed to cease the watch upon his foes. His body apparently knew no weariness, though he never seemed to sleep ; but, as the sufferings of the besieged became more obvious, a stern smile would light up his savage face.

‘Yet once again the Mullas made a desperate attempt to escape. Goaded on by the scorn and scoffs of their women, they charged down on the Parkingees, the strongest leading, the weaker staggering after, with fierce, hollow eyes and gaunt, hungry forms. All in vain, however, was the furious effort ; the weapons of their vigorous enemies easily thrust them back. Bleeding, jeered at and reviled, they returned to their camp never to make one struggle more for life, only to endure with sullen despair the tortures which slowly led to the end. As the women saw their defeat and lingering retreat up the hill, a wild wail of utter woe and anguish broke from them, and, as though one thought animated them, they caught up their children, rushed to the line of their tormentors,



and with loud cries and entreaties urged them to spare and save the little ones, though but as slaves.

‘It was in vain. They were met by the same circle of inexorable warriors and bristling spears. Then an awful despair seized the frantic mothers, and they hurled the little ones into the midst of their foe and upon their uplifted weapons, on the points of which they were caught by the jeering braves and tossed back to the frenzied women. Then they too retired to the rocks, bewailing the destruction of their race, never more to endeavour to excite the mercy of their destroyers.

‘When morning broke, the Parkingees saw them congregated round the now nearly dried spring, forming from its ooze helmets of white clay wherewith to cover their burning heads, and in some measure assuage their agony and thirst. The sun, and the fire that later swept over their camp, baked the cases hard as you have seen them. Then the Parkingees knew that the consummation of their vengeance was near. Still day followed day, and moving forms, as well as wails of anguish, showed that some of the miserable people yet lingered on. Still the sun rose like a ball of fire each morning and poured his scorching rays down upon the dying race, agonised by the double torture of hunger and thirst. There seemed no pity in that fiery, cloudless sky, no hope of rain or mercy from God or man; and so they languished and died, until of all the tribe there remained but one.

‘He, their medicine-man and chief, yet lived to curse and vilify the foe. Gaunt and haggard, he stood by the image of his race, on the rocks that towered above the wasted bodies of his people festering in the blazing heat, and watched the approach of the triumphant victors, coming to exult over and insult the dead. With his bones protruding through the skin, his long unkempt locks falling down the hollow cheeks and over the skeleton shoulders, his whole form attenuated and withered in the last stages of starvation, he looked the very incarnation of want and misery. Yet from the depth of the sunken eyes the lightning of hate and defiance, of scorn

of his sufferings and their inflictors, flashed out while he awaited their coming. As they drew round the base of the cliff, his voice was heard, at first weak as the utterance of a sick child, but anon rising in its strength until it echoed from the caverns of the rocks and rolled over the heads of his awestruck hearers strong and piercing as the "Nichie's" cry.

" "Cowards of the Parka ; come you to gloat and triumph over the extinction of the ancient race of the Mullas ? Behold the accomplishment of your purpose in the putrefying forms of the aged and the young, the mother and the child alike. On the dead features see imprinted the agony that has ended their lives, such as no words can paint, and then dare, if you can, to think that no retribution shall track the steps of your nation. I stand alone, amid the ruin of my tribe, wrought by your implacable hate, and the future opens to my sight. I curse you with my dying breath and you shall be cursed. You, the ruthless destroyers of a whole people, shall in your turn be as ruthlessly swept from the path of the coming race, like the grass before the scorching blast of the North. Your weapons and struggles shall be as vain against them, as ours have been against you. They will take your hunting-grounds from you, they will make your warriors their servants, and your women the slaves of their will. In the pride of their power they will scorn your groans and laugh at your tears, for in the days of your abasement you shall weep like children instead of resisting like men. By diseases that ye know not shall you be stricken ; some, slow and foul, shall eat the life away, that like cravens you will cling to, till you rot in your camps ; others, swift as the swoop of a hawk, shall make him who was in the morning a strong man in the evening a festering corpse. These things will come upon you, until such terror will sink into your hearts that you will believe the spirits of the lost Mullas haunt you in the gloaming and follow your steps in the night, as they wail the curse in your shuddering ears, so that the bravest dare not stir from the camp-fire. The sacred image of our race I leave as a symbol of my curse.





You dare not destroy it now, for then your whole tribe would wither and die in an hour, and even as I speak, superstitious awe takes hold upon you. Hide it away as you may, the day shall come when one of the mighty people who avenge the massacre of my nation will behold the holy figure, and then the last wretched remnant of the Parkingees shall perish ; and thus the pitiless slaughter of the Mullas shall be fully avenged. Back ! I hasten to meet the death that beckons me to join the spirits of my race."

' As the word left his lips, he plunged over the edge of the cliff, and fell in a lifeless, mangled heap at the feet of his startled foes. A silent awe hung over them, till the voice of Barpoo broke the spell.

" " I spit upon the Mulla, though he died like a warrior. His words are grievous, but our vengeance is complete. Let their whole camp be given to the flames and consumed, that not one bone be left. As for the sacred image on yonder rock, the old men in council will decide, where and how it shall be hid."

' The fierceness had left his eye, and in its stead there shone a softer light ; but on his brow already lay a deeper gloom, as if he believed in, nay, already felt, the curse. His orders were never unheeded, and, almost before his speech was ended, his men began taking down the skeletons of the Parkingee women from the poles ; this done, they were borne away to be buried, and the camp of the Mullas was given to the flames. When the next morning broke, there only remained a heap of ashes and the copija head-coverings. The ashes have long been scattered by the mighty " Yerto," but the helmets yet lie beneath the loose sand, the last memento of a lost race—these and the sacred image.

' That night, when the tribe were in the midst of the feast and dance of triumph, six of the most trusted and highest in rank amongst the chiefs bore the image away, none else knew whither, and from that day to this only half-a-dozen at a time know of its hiding-place. As one dies, another is appointed, so that the number should not fail. Three times,

when in danger of discovery by the white man, it has been moved, lest its discovery should lead to the final fulfilment of the curse denounced upon our race by the dying Mulla. I, with five others, only know where it rests ; but, though we tremble at your power, and cringe at a blow from your whips, yet the secret has not been divulged, and may he who shall ever do so be thrice accursed ! May he never know the love of women nor the friendship of man ; may children shrink from his touch, and the very dogs recoil from his step ; and, not having known one joy, may he go down to his grave with the curses of a whole nation upon his spirit ! All but the last part of the Mulla's curse has come upon us. We have beheld the approach of the white man, the Boree of our race foretold by the Mulla. Our resistance has been as nought before his insatiable power, our weapons as vain against his fire-arms as were the Mulla's stones before our spears. We have shrunk and withered at his advance, and cowered under his sway. What we are, you well know, and you truly say that it is destined that the black man must give way before the onward march of your race.'

\* \* \* \* \*

The fire died out of the old man's eyes as he ceased, and in its place came the hungry look of the beggar, as with outstretched hand he whined out once more his oft-repeated plea for ' bacca.'

\* \* \* \* \*

' Do you mean to tell me this is a true and literal translation of that old savage's long-winded yarn, and not an exaggerated tissue of manufactured trash ? ' objected Hazle, as Roland repeated the story to him on their way home. ' But for the fact that he was so excited and in such hot earnest I wouldn't credit a single word of it. Why the deuce couldn't you put it into common-sense prose in any case ? That romantic, half-breed poetry may please beardless boys and silly girls, but it makes a man who has shed his milk-teeth sick.'

' I quite expected this tirade from the most impracticable

and unbelieving of mortals,' replied Roland. 'If you knew the aborigines as intimately as I do, you would be aware that they are fond of oratorical effect, and, like most uncivilised people, indulge in figurative language and word-painting. To be prosaic I should have to tell the tale myself; I have preferred to allow him to speak in his own person.'

'Then there is some truth in the story, and I must not attribute it all to your fertile imagination?' said his somewhat mollified friend.

'Don't pay my imagination any such undeserved compliment. The old man believes it to be gospel, and I certainly saw the cement helmets, and searched for the reported image. I shall never cease to regret their loss, as they must have been of great interest to scientists.'

'Yes, and might have told something of the past history of a tribe now extinct,' replied Hazle, 'if I am to believe your ancient chieftain.'

'And, you might add, of another soon to follow, for the poor old heathen has correctly gauged the fate of his own race.'

'And for all the good that he or the rest of them are,' growled the man with a liver, 'I don't see any reason to make a fuss about it, but some folks must grow sentimental over the end, even of useless things.'

## CHAPTER XII

### ERÔS THE ALL-SUBDUER

As the friends slowly walked back to the Station the manners and customs of the natives formed the subject of an animated discussion between them. In those days, as now, the unfortunate people were much misunderstood and misrepresented, few of those best acquainted with them allowing that they possess any virtues or any intelligence superior to that of the monkey.

Mr. Hazle was essentially one of these. A prejudiced martinet, with a most irascible temper, rather than endeavour to acquire a knowledge of their language and customs, he had chosen to assume that they perfectly understood his broken English or more mutilated native tongue, and exacted a prompt obedience to commands which were not comprehended. On his part, therefore, the result was a confirmed conviction of their impenetrable stupidity, which nothing had hitherto shaken, except perhaps Miola herself. This girl, however, he looked upon as an exceptional growth, a *lusus naturæ*, who only proved the general rule.

‘I tell you,’ exclaimed Grantley, ‘these people possess a higher order of intelligence than you give them credit for. Their skill in hunting, their laws to prevent intermarrying among relations, however distant (from which we might take a lesson), the destruction of deformed children at birth, the respect and care enjoined upon the young and strong for the aged and infirm, their honesty towards each other (for who ever heard of a black fellow, before he was contaminated by his white brother, stealing from his countrymen ?) all prove it.’

‘Hold hard,’ cried Hazle. ‘It strikes me that I have heard of even your estimable savage making off with his friend’s wife, often (possibly erroneously) supposed to be his most valued possession.’

‘I must admit,’ said the other, ‘that he is no more virtuous and honourable where the tender passion comes in than his pale-faced brother ; this, indeed, I have never claimed for him, but I ’ll be hanged if he is less so.’

‘Maybe not ; but we are travelling far from the point whence we started. You say they have traditions and stories, none of which I had heard until an hour ago, when you repeated to me what that old madman told you.’

‘I have not done with you yet,’ replied Grantley. ‘Miola has a tale she tells of true love that did not run smooth, which in its main incidents much resembles some of our saddest ballads, over which generations have wept. It shows that these dusky men and maidens can dare and die for love like



other mortals. Now, as you know, Miola learned to read and write fairly well with Mrs. Darly's children, and so became acquainted with several simple story-books, in which she took great interest. Naturally a clever girl, this no doubt quickened her intelligence, and led to her telling me anything she knew of a similar nature in the past history of her people.'

'Ah well, if it is Curlywig who is to be the narrator I shall listen with pleasure ; I 've had enough of the bombast of your first selection.'

'At least, you will be ready to believe the principal incident of this tale, for it is only a few weeks ago that an event of a somewhat similar kind occurred here.'

'And what might that be ? ' asked Hazle.

'A black fellow, in a moment of jealousy, struck his lubra—little black Nancy—with his boomerang, and killed her. Fearing the vengeance of her relatives, he immediately bolted up the river. There was the devil of a row, and a few of the leading men of the tribe came to ascertain my views on the outrage. They wanted to know if I purposed interfering.'

'Which, of course, in spite of your cynicism, you meant to do,' said Hazle, 'in your character of universal redresser of wrongs, by following after and shooting the brutal murderer of that mere child.'

'By no means,' replied Grantley. 'When I can, I invariably leave them to settle these little private matters in their own summary manner, and according to their own laws and customs.'

'And by thus shirking your own self-assumed responsibilities you conveniently avoid an embarrassing situation.'

'I must admit it ; but I still think it is better not to interfere.'

'Are you quite satisfied,' asked Hazle, 'that it was so ; for instance, when they came to inquire if they were to kill the new-born baby ? Why, a word from you would have saved it.'

'Possibly,' returned Grantley, 'but they told me it was a cripple, and, if it lived, must always be so. Under such circumstances, I considered life no boon, and that our

civilisation might accept a lesson from their savagery, and I therefore declined to intervene.'

'So the child was knocked on the head, a victim to your adaptation of the Darwinian theory of the survival of the fittest. Well, quitting that question, what of the wife-killer?'

'As I said, he cleared out; and when the niggers understood that the matter was left to them they quickly organised a party of avengers from among the relatives of the dead woman. Within an hour they were off hot-foot in pursuit, and in four or five days ran the poor devil down.'

'Of course he showed fight, for, to do them justice, they are no cowards,' said Hazle.

'I fancy he had no chance, as they closed round him at night. What could he do under these circumstances, for even the most skilful aboriginal warrior cannot guard both back and front with six inches of shield.'

'Served the d——d scoundrel right,' pronounced Hazle. 'I must acknowledge, though, that the black wretches die hard. I know a case in Queensland in which one of them, a noted outlaw, fell fighting like a hero against fearful odds. He had long been a marked man for a series of offences, and a party of whites eventually caught him on a plain with no cover but the high grass. They were on horseback, so escape was all but hopeless. He did not attempt it, but took refuge in a bunch of the tallest tussock-grass, from which he defied his foes to come on. If one dared to approach he darted out and hurled a spear or boomerang at him, though himself a target for their fire. So he kept them at bay till he sank grievously wounded, but grimly defiant to the last, his courage extorting the unwilling admiration of at least one of his slayers, whom I heard relating the incident.'

'Absolutely the first time I have ever heard you say one word in favour of a black fellow,' said Grantley, as they approached the house.

'Not at all. Here comes Miola to testify that I have often praised her.'

'You nearly always scold and swear bad words at the

blacks, and they don't like it,' said that downright young person.

'I'll never do it again, if you will tell me the pretty tale Mr. Grantley says you know about your people.'

'What tale is that? I don't know any that will please you, for you hate the blacks.'

'Then you must teach me to know better. Is it a true story?'

'Now, I won't tell you, because you won't believe it.'

'Deuce take the girl.'

'There you are, swearing again, as you always do.'

'Grantley, here is one of your vassals obdurate to all my blandishments.'

'Pretty blandishments,' laughed Roland. 'Well, never mind him, Miola, it's only his way.'

'But I don't like his way. He's not a bit like you; he is always making game of me,' pouted Miola. 'But I will tell *you* the story:—

*A True Tale of the Wompangees.*

'Watulgunya was the pride of his race. Swift as the emu, supple as the kangaroo, and cunning as the dingo, never did he return empty-handed from the hunt. Well knew he how to imitate the shrill whistle of the hawk, and his hand was skilled to guide the net when the swift black duck, widgeon, and teal were to be ensnared. He was the delight of the maidens and the envy of the young men, and the chiefs were ever extolling his powers. His boomerang flew the farthest and returned the surest; and woe to the warrior who hoped to parry the deadly flight of his spear.

'Now Watulgunya loved Nilyillie of the dark locks, glossy with ointment from the fat of the emu; but she was the destined bride of Poorndie, for so according to the time-honoured laws had the elders decreed, and to attempt to evade their decision was death. Well knew Watulgunya this, for had he not seen young Coolpa struck down by the avenging spear of the injured lord of the frail but loving Wallarie.

Moreover he loathed his own betrothed, the one-eyed Manoree, whose face was as the face of a one-eyed codfish. Fierce were the contentions in the camp of the Wompangees, for the jealous Manoree said her youth was passing away and no child was hers to train up to bring fish and meat to her yapra, when her eye became too dim and her arm too weak to grind the parper. Poorndie, too, claimed his bride, and coarsely swore he had already waited too long ; for the bust of Nilyillie was as the bust of a full-grown woman. The patience of the old men being exhausted by the lover's delays, they at length decided that Nilyillie should go to Poorndie's yapra before the sun had risen twice. The *muckily* (dance) and feast were over, and the tribe slept the sleep of repletion, when the spear of Watulgunya stirred the locks of Nilyillie and his voice whispered to her to come forth and they would fly. Loud beat her heart, but it was faithful to the call of her lover, and she crept out to flee with the young hero of the Wompangees to their hereditary foes, the Barengees, far away across the almost boundless plains of the Mulga land. On, on they went, for they knew that the swift trackers would be on their trail at the dawn of day, and to be overtaken meant death for one and almost worse for the other.

‘ Meanwhile, as day broke, the flight was discovered. Dark was the brow of Poorndie, and fiercely glowered the eye of Manoree as she brandished her *nulla-nulla* and yelled for vengeance. A council was quickly called at which the avengers were appointed, those considered most wronged having the first claim to act as such. The evil Poorndie stepped out first, and was sworn to strike the first blow, though needless that vow, for the lust of blood was in his eye, and would only be appeased by the life-blood of Watulgunya. The young brother of Nilyillie had the right of the second blow. He was still a boy, but there was no tremor in his voice as he stepped out and struck his spear into the ground, vowing it should quiver even so in the heart of his sister's seducer. An uncle and a cousin followed, who also vowed to see the deed of blood completed, and strike their weapons

in the body of the fugitive. Already the trail had been found, an easy matter for the keen-eyed savage, and away bound the four avengers on the track. Alas for the dark-eyed Nilyillie! how could her tender limbs fly fast enough to escape the fleet, inexorable Poorndie, and the lithe and springy stride of her avenging brother? Each hour brought them nearer, and at the end of the third day, as evening fell, the broken grass, still unwithered, showed that the lovers' footsteps had just passed over it. Then the band halted, and the lynx-eyed Poorndie crept on alone, until he discovered his prey camped under cover of some low bushes by a small pool. Weary was Nilyillie, nor could she farther go, but the strength of Watulgunya was still unspent; his eye still roamed around and his ears were still keen to catch the slightest sound. The scout saw there was no chance of their escape, for the exhausted girl could struggle no farther; then he settled himself to watch till sleep should overcome the eyes of the hunted brave. Hours passed away, till at last Watulgunya slept, and then the spy crept back to his band. A few moments sufficed to explain the position and the order of attack, then, weapons in hand, they stole to the side of the doomed and slumbering man. A twig was broken and he awoke; his boomerang flashed from his hand, laying open the body of Poorndie from chest to groin at the same moment as the tomahawk of the latter crashed into his brain, and the brother's spear reached his heart. Then followed a shower of blows until each warrior's weapon was dyed in the blood of the slain, to show as a proof that their vows had been well kept. They scooped out two shallow graves some distance apart for the bodies of the dead foes. Over Poorndie they placed boughs of trees and stones to mark the resting-place of a warrior, but Watulgunya's was unmarked, as the grave of a dishonoured man, so that like his memory it might be blotted out and forgotten. These duties performed, they started back with the unresisting Nilyillie to the camp of their people. She was contemptuously left at liberty; escape for her they knew was hopeless, if she even had dared the attempt. On

the fifth day they reached the camp, and told the tale of pursuit and death. Then arose the wild wail for Poorndie, dead in his prime ; but Watulgunya's name is heard no more in the assemblies of his tribe. His old mother even keeps silence ; and if her thoughts dwell upon her slaughtered son, none know it from her words, though her eye grows dim and her strength fails her, for he was her only child.

' Nilyillie was given to be the wife of the least worthy of the old men, but she brought no sunshine to his yapra ; and though her voice was often heard, there was no music in it. True, she accepted her lot with the sullen apathy characteristic of the women of the tribes of the Parka—unsophisticated children of nature as they are—but her brother knew she shrank from his very touch, and that her heart was buried in the grave of Watulgunya, by the silent pool. Manoree, too, grew more venomous and fierce than ever, and many were the fights among the women of the Wompangees when passionate words rose high, and then the *nulla-nulla* of Nilyillie ever sought the head of the one-eyed hag.'

\*   \*   \*   \*   \*   \*   \*

The girl ceased, and as she did so the animation died out of her dark face and great bright eyes.

' You have told it very well, Miola,' exclaimed Roland.

' It 's a better tale than that old fossil's,' retorted Hazle.

' What 's a fossil ? ' asked Miola of her master.

' That old idiot of a ram-shepherd is one,' retorted Hazle.

' Well, his story about the Mullas is quite true—quite as true as mine,' she said simply.

' No doubt ; but, whether true or not, I will never deny again that the natives have traditions. I give in, Grantley, and it's about time, for I see you are itching to impart a long-winded yarn yourself, which God forbid. I survived "The Legend of the Mullas," and even enjoyed "The True Tale of the Wompangees," because of Miola's manner and musical tones ; but try my forbearance no further—it has its limits.'

## CHAPTER XIII

## ON BOARD THE 'PLOVER'

THE big flood came, and the great river with all its lakes and estuaries overflowed. For months the wide stretch of land, known in squatter's parlance as 'flooded country,' and marked as subject to inundation by the growth of box-trees and other kinds of eucalyptus, was submerged, much of it under many feet of water. All through the continuance of the waters the breeding of the water-fowl never ceased. It was simply marvellous to witness their fecundity; every hollow limb in the lowest box or the loftiest gum-tree was occupied by a laying or sitting duck, bringing forth her young brood to add to the innumerable fluffy specks that already besprinkled the waters. Not in such places alone was the ardent reproduction of species carried on, for by some caprice or necessity others also chose to make their nests in or under bushes or grass many miles from water. How the tender duckling ever reached the element necessary to its existence, was long an enigma. Some close observers argued that it was by patient walking, but no one ever saw them thus in transit. Then, again, how could those hatched in hollows, at a height of a hundred feet up gums, reach the water? It could not be said that they dropped or dived into it, for, whether this feat were possible or impossible, there were very many of these great trees growing over no water.

No doubt the black fellow, with his keen insight into the habits of all the creatures of his native land, is right, and the parent bird carries them both down from the lofty monarch of the forest and in from the dry land, and that doubtless by night, when their enemies the hawks are at rest; but whether they are held in the bill or nestle in the feathers we know not—probably the latter.

There was now such plenty that the squatter's life was one of ease. Stock required little attention, and even shepherds almost ceased from troubling. Grantley spent

much of his life among the blacks, accompanying them in many of their hunting excursions. He often went out in their canoes to rob the ducks of their eggs, and watched that unequalled climber, the Australian aborigine, making his way with unparalleled dexterity and confidence step by step in little notches, cut with a light tomahawk in the bark of the tall, straight gum-trees, to a dizzy height, then out on the limbs to one nest or more ; and finally—more wonderful still—safely retracing his steps, though burdened with his fragile spoil. On other days they caught the ducks themselves in the nets, than which no more skilful adaptation of simple means to circumvent timid wild creatures was ever devised by the instinct or reason of the hunter.

A large net is made of thin string, some thirty feet by ten. It is suspended on a line about twenty feet high across a stream or lagoon between two trees, if they happen to serve ; if not, on poles erected for the purpose. One end of the line is made fast on the opposite side, the other brought through a notch or fork on the top of the tree or pole, and attached to a stick pushed lightly into the ground, so lightly that the impetus of a flying duck, striking the net, drags it up.

Beaters are usually employed, unless, as is frequently the case, the birds are habitually flying over the scene of operations. A few bushes may be placed to cover the two or more natives required at the net, and then all is ready. Presently a flight of ducks comes flashing along ; as they approach, a shrill whistle, imitating the cry of the hawk, rings out, and at the same moment a piece of bark is skilfully flung above them. The frightened birds, bewildered at the supposed appearance of their enemy, dash down and into the net ; it falls, and they are caught in its meshes. The watchers rush into the water, wring the necks of the captives, and toss them on shore ; the net is pulled up again ready for the next lot ; and so the sport goes on.

A few of the birds may check the impetus of their flight at the net, and rise over or dash under it, but by far the greater number are enveloped in its folds ; and the day in-



variably ends by the capture of game sufficient to supply the station with as many as can be used of the fattest and best.

The floods appeared to have cleared the bushrangers out, nothing having been heard of them for many months in the vicinity of the Darling, and men almost ceased to talk of them. The police-force was recalled to the more settled districts, with the exception of one or two men stationed in the townships. Their want of success in capturing the ruffians had been adversely criticised in the severest terms, and they were now eager to distinguish themselves on the first opportunity the outlaws offered.

Roland Grantley, too, chafed at the thought that his enemy was still at large. He had by no means forgotten the awful suffering he had endured while chained to the box-tree, and it was not in his nature to forgive it. But, as the season was so magnificent, and other circumstances favourable, he determined to visit the capital. There was important business of a financial nature there that required his personal attention. Years had elapsed since he had left the stations, and the present appeared the best opportunity for doing so. The river was navigable; he would step on board the first steamer that passed his door downwards, and in a few weeks reach Adelaide, transact his business there, order supplies sufficient to last him for some years, and return with them. Once having decided to go, it took but a few days to make arrangements, Hazle again consenting to undertake the responsibility of management.

'It's a good season,' he said, 'or I'll be hanged if I would. Everything seems to go on as right as a trivet when you are in command. It's my cursed luck, I suppose, that everything goes wrong when you are away.'

'It will be easy this time,' rejoined Grantley, 'with feed and water everywhere. You will be able to smoke your pipe, and congratulate yourself daily on the brilliant success of your control of affairs; probably you may even arrive at the conclusion that the heavy losses, which so frequently occur, are the natural result of the incapacity of managers.'

'Which is precisely the opinion at which you, in your overweening arrogance, long ago arrived,' retorted Hazle.

'Fairly thrust,' laughed the other, 'and driven home right under the fifth rib—though why the old Hebrew writers selected that as the most fatal spot, I am not anatomist enough to say.'

As usual, there was some more sparring between the friends, which need not be narrated; then they entered upon business matters, and when they rose Grantley felt himself at liberty to betake himself to his travels at any time. Fortune favoured his determination, for the very next evening the shrill whistle of a steamer coming down the river was heard, and she presently drew up to the bank at the station door. The delay only occupied a few minutes, and she again headed swiftly down the stream with the owner of Moolahalla on board.

The boat was one of the usual river-navigation type, though, perhaps, rather higher than usual out of the water, of about sixty tons burden. Instead of open-sea bulwarks, movable iron stanchions, with a rope from one to the other, were the only protection against tumbling overboard. The accommodation for the few passengers carried was principally provided in a deck-house, but there was also a saloon below in the stern. To compensate for her carrying capacity being so small, and to enable a considerable cargo to be carried with a slight draught of water, she towed two barges, each much larger than herself. These followed one behind the other, so that there were three vessels, in a line, winding round the sinuous course of the river. All were laden with bales of wool four tiers high, which gave them a most imposing appearance, and rendered such tortuous navigation a matter of much anxiety and responsibility. When it was necessary to stop to take in wood for fuel, or to call at township or station, the steamer gave notice to the men steering the barges by an ear-piercing whistle, that startled all creation within a wide radius.

Captain Elijah Tongs, of the powerful steamer *Plover*, loved

that instrument of torture, and lost no opportunity of waking the echoes and alarming nature with its discordant screams.

This worthy was a strong, thick-set man, who apparently only required sleep in homœopathic doses and at long intervals. Such of his complexion as was left might be considered fair, since it certainly could not be thought dark. Fiery it undoubtedly was ; indeed, there were times when he appeared just bursting into a blaze. As might be supposed from these external indications, his choler was very near the surface, and a continual stumbling-block to him, for the captain, like many of his fraternity, had been 'converted.' The old Adam, however, would on occasion assert himself. A clumsy barge-man, instead of bringing his craft gliding gently alongside the steamer when required, might nervously come up with a bump. Then the vials of the captain's wrath were emptied, and the culprit would be asked 'where the —— he was raised,' and would be sarcastically told that 'if he couldn't steer the —— boat better than that, he had best turn parlour-maid, and be d——d to him.'

He was immensely powerful and an accomplished bruiser, which reputation probably often saved him hot retorts ; but with all his peculiarities he was a great favourite with his men, who generally calculated that a severe jobation meant a handsome present at the termination of the voyage. Many were the stories told about the worthy skipper. Once a new hand, when heartily sworn at, answered back somewhat intemperately, whereupon the choleric master caught him by the collar and dipped him two or three times over the side in the current. On subsequently being remonstrated with on the subject, he replied he thought that the best way to cool the man's temper.

But the tales were not always to the advantage of the stalwart mariner. On another occasion words ran high, and, after apparently receiving with exemplary patience a more than usually prolonged discharge of bristling oaths, the recipient turned and promptly knocked the captain down on his own deck. Without a word he picked himself up, seized the wheel,

ran the steamer into the bank, and calmly ordered her to be made fast. Then he politely invited his assailant to accompany him on shore, and proceeded to 'dress him down.' Alas for human vanity! Captain Elijah Tongs returned on board frankly acknowledging that he had met his conqueror.

This incident was previous to his conversion, and had presumably been repented of and forgiven; but it was still understood that the weakness of the Christian must not be tried too far.

The crew call for no special remark; they were the usual stamp of men who, at that period, manned the river-boats—half-seamen, half-landsmen, who could turn their hands to almost anything.

There were only three adult passengers besides Roland, two of them being ladies—Mrs. Ingleton, the wife of a squatter on the Barwon, and her sister-in-law. The former was perhaps about thirty years of age, good-looking, with a pleasant, kindly face, and the mother of two children whom she thought perfection, which they certainly were not. Miss Ingleton was almost a beauty. Over the middle height, slender but exquisitely proportioned, she struck the beholder with the grace of her every movement. Her features were far from perfect, but formed on the whole a charming face, crowned as it was by a mass of shining golden-brown hair, and lit up by clear blue eyes, innocent and trustful as those of a little child. Such was Clara Ingleton when Roland Grantley first met her on the deck of the *Plover* as she steered away from Moolahalla station, at an age when his heart might be presumed to be susceptible to attractions less striking than those of the fair girl at his side.

The other grown-up passenger was the nurse to the children and attendant on the ladies—a middle-aged woman of neutral tints and qualities, whose principal object and interest in life seemed to be to impress upon others the fact that she had once been in better circumstances.

For the first two or three days there was little or no intercourse between the travellers. Grantley spent nearly the

AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL  
USING FIRE-DRILL



AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL  
THROWING BOMERANG





whole time with the master in the wheel-house, when he was not in his cabin. Of course, the passengers met at meals, when the customary civilities were interchanged ; but nothing more passed between them, and Miss Ingleton felt much disposed to rate the reserved young squatter as shy.

With his face set southward, he was thinking now almost always of Petrel, and consequently had become more than ordinarily silent. He had, indeed, no thought for other women while her image remained so vivid in his recollection.

Miss Clara began to feel some feminine chagrin that the undoubtedly interesting stranger paid so slight regard to her sweet self. During twelve months' residence on her brother's station, she had experienced no lack of attention from every male biped she had met, whether aged or of juvenile years ; and the neglect of the one man she had now the opportunity of impressing was rank heresy to her faith in woman's charms. From the beginning to the end of that halcyon period, all had vied in the ardour of their worship ; and it was really surprising to Mr. Ingleton that so many more of his neighbours than heretofore found that important business, that admitted of no postponement, called them to Whacutmuttee. How, then, was it that Mr. Grantley, with such splendid opportunities, the field being entirely clear for him, held aloof ? It was really too provoking, and she almost hated him for it ; at least she would have done so, only he looked unhappy—and—nice.

On the third day, however, an event happened that swept the restraint aside like the veriest cobweb. In the early morning, at the first streak of light, that most rest-disturbing and detestable whistle pierced the solitudes, giving warning that the moment of departure from the bank, at which the steamer and barges, in accordance with the usual custom when going down stream, were moored for the night, had arrived. Then followed the bumping and stamping on the decks, that river passengers know so well, preparatory to getting under way. Above all rang out the stentorian tones of Captain Tongs, giving the orders that an

imperative necessity appeared to demand should be uttered in the loudest possible key at a time when most people wanted to sleep.

In the midst of all this confused din the flotilla got into motion, and then what exactly followed, or how the accident happened, was never made quite clear.

The captain declared, 'It was only the —— carelessness of the —— bargeman who steered the after boat'; but that aggrieved functionary vehemently asseverated, almost with tears in his eyes, that in the imperfect light (the anxiety of the master to lose no time causing him to start so early), and with the wash made by the steamer and the barge in front of him, he could not see the snag. Anyhow, the boat went into it, and, having a big hole knocked in her bottom, there was barely time to run her into the bank when down she went. But for the promptitude of the poor fellow who brought the catastrophe about, in smartly getting a line out and making it fast to a tree, she must have slipped off and sunk in deep water.

Under present conditions she lay nearly broadside-on to the river with her stern submerged.

The irate Tongs was somewhat mollified by the commendable conduct of his subordinate subsequent to the accident; and, when he had told him that 'any —— fool with his —— eyes shut might have seen a —— snag as big as a —— mountain, he referred no more to the subject, but expended all his energies in landing the cargo.

Roland immediately got up and joined the rest in endeavouring to save the wool, working till midday as hard as any one, even the indefatigable Tongs himself.

By this time they had got to the hold, where there was not room for all hands, so, as his services were no longer required, he returned on board the steamer, which had been moored some little distance above the sunken barge with her bow against the shore and her stern out in the stream. He passed along her deck, and, being heated with his exertions, sat down on the poop with his coat still over his arm. Just



then Miss Ingleton came out of the cabin with the two children, and began playing with them. Presently, as they played, she ran backwards with the children after her, and not noticing that the stanchions with the rope-guard had for some purpose been taken down, she fell backwards into the river with a scream and an appealing look towards Grantley on her fair young face.

## CHAPTER XIV

### AN ACCIDENT AND ITS RESULTS

ROLAND GRANTLEY promptly responded to that mute appeal, though, it must be admitted, not quite after the manner of the born-and-bred rescuers of beauty in distress, whom we read of in romance. There may, indeed, be a difference of opinion as to what he might and ought to have done. The lady most in question was the sole observer of his initial actions, and, in justice to him, it must be said she always expressed extreme admiration for what she called his 'noble conduct.' On seeing the fall, his first idea was to fling her a rope and haul her out when she had grasped it, but there was none handy; his second was to look out for a life-buoy, but they were kept up in the wheel-house on the hurricane deck. Now, both these would have been decidedly unheroic proceedings when a damsel's life was trembling in the balance. His third thought, however, was to jump in after her, which he accordingly did. From the method underlying this procedure it may safely be inferred that he was not in love with Miss Ingleton. A lover would have splashed in, utterly oblivious of whether that would be the least use or not, and would have thought of such subsidiary things as ropes and buoys later. Though he had never attempted to save a drowning person, he on several occasions had seen the splendid black swimmers do it, and was well aware that the feat was both difficult and dangerous in a strong current. But he was not a man to lose his head and act precipitately under

any circumstances, so he made the most of the brief moment at his disposal to decide upon the best means to adopt to save the life in peril, which, after all, was the best thing he could do.

When he sprang over the side, he clung at first to the combing and held out his foot for her to seize. This she missed, however, and he then let go and swam to her. All this occupied but a few seconds, and her clothes were still supporting her. Saying quickly, 'Put your hand on my shoulder and don't be frightened; we shall soon be all right,' he struck out for the helm that hung near, swinging down the stream. He would easily have reached it, if she had only obeyed his injunction and kept quiet; but, losing her presence of mind, she climbed upon him, pressing him under water. Having missed the rudder, they were at once caught by the full strength of the current and swept down the river. Grantley now had to make for the barge, but, impeded as he was by the affrighted girl, though a strong swimmer, he was most of the time beneath the surface. When in deep, dense water, however, by vigorous strokes he could make some progress towards the shore, and even occasionally bring her up for a short time to breathe.

Meantime, the alarm had been given, and the captain and a fine young fellow sprang in. The former reached the spot first, but Roland had already sunk a second time. With a bellow that the struggling pair could hear at the bottom of the Darling, he roared for a boat and turned back. The other joined Grantley, who had struggled to the surface again with his helpless burden, and now thought there would be little further difficulty; but the swirling current swept all three under once more. By this time they were near the barge, and a rope, flung from it, fell circling round into Roland's hand, just as they were again sinking. As he pulled up hand over hand, the thought crossed his mind, 'Am I going towards the slack end?'—then it tightened, and he knew they were saved. A moment more, and all three reached the surface, and were pulled on to the deck of the barge. Miss Ingleton,

who was by this time unconscious, was without delay carried on board the *Plover*, where her sister-in-law, in great alarm, administered assistance and comfort. Her rescuer seemed almost as collected as usual, and quickly walked off to his cabin, shortly appearing on deck with his accustomed composure, as if nothing out of the ordinary course had occurred. Perhaps for him nothing had, but for her the whole of life was for ever changed. The man, who merely excited her interest before, was now a hero. Young, ardent, and impressionable, was it likely that she could believe herself saved from death by such sustained efforts and courage without feeling grateful?—and we know that gratitude is akin to love.

‘Oh, Agnes,’ she exclaimed, when she had recovered a little from the shock of her prolonged immersion, ‘how shall I ever thank him enough for his noble conduct?’

‘I daresay we shall manage, dear, to say all he will desire,’ returned her sister. ‘Mr. Grantley does not strike me as likely to be very exacting in that way. He gives one the impression that he thinks women and their ways rather tiresome.’

Strange to say this was just what Clara had thought herself a short hour ago, but now she felt quite ready to take up arms in his defence. Seeing the light of battle in her eyes, Mrs. Ingleton added—

‘I really must go and thank him, however, since you won’t be presentable for some time.’

‘Yes, and come back and tell me what he says,’ replied the girl, ‘or I’ll get up myself.’

But Grantley had gone on shore, having learned from the nurse that the young lady was rapidly recovering. He might there be seen with a cigar in his mouth, placidly watching the men unload the few remaining bales of wool. Was there ever such a provoking man, to take himself away just when two women, whom he had laid under deep obligation, were burning to relieve their feelings by thanking him?

‘It just looks as if he did not think my life worth saving, or even being thanked for,’ almost sobbed Miss Clara, when

her sister informed her of the position of affairs ; ' and I am not sure that it is.'

Which indicates that the speaker was beginning to think, that what Roland Grantley thought was of some importance to her. That evening he was engaged with the captain until late, and the ladies (for the invalid had insisted on getting up), after hoping in vain to see him in the saloon or on deck, retired to rest. A great part of the night Miss Ingleton lay awake, wondering what could be the reason why the squatter never came near her. Another man, who had performed such a service, would have found a hundred pretexts, nay, would in common politeness have come to inquire after her.

' I am afraid he is a boor,' she thought ; and then decided there was nothing boorish in his appearance or manners. ' Well, then, he is a woman-hater, and that's worse,' but somehow she derived more than a grain of comfort from the belief that he did not hate *her*.

Early the next morning the everlasting whistle shrieked out, as if suffering untold agonies, but Clara almost blessed it. The steamer was under way again, leaving the damaged barge and her crew behind, and Mr. Grantley could not escape her if he tried ever so much ; besides, she knew he generally rose about daylight and strolled on the deck. She waited till a reasonable hour, then dressed herself in a charming morning costume, and stepped outside her door. There, a few feet below, was the river in which she had so nearly lost her young life, and not much further away stood, with his back to her, the man who had saved it. Now was the opportunity. Pale but determined, she moved towards him as he turned round.

' Mr. Grantley,' she said tremulously, as she held out her hand, ' I must try to thank you.'

Taking her hand he led her to a seat. ' No,' he replied, ' you must do nothing of the kind. Any one on board would have done as much, and that, probably, better than I.'

' Please don't try to make little of it ; you risked your life for a perfect stranger, and I shall always feel so grateful.'

‘ Please don’t try to make much of it,’ replied he, echoing her words with a smile. ‘ The risk at first was very slight ; I thought to have reached the rudder by swimming a few strokes.’

‘ Yes, and you would have done so, if I had only kept quiet as you told me, but I was so frightened, and now feel so ashamed of my cowardice. It might have cost both our lives.’

‘ Oh no ; I should simply have been enabled to restore you to your sister-in-law a little sooner. I hope you suffer no inconvenience from the ducking.’

‘ Yes I do,’ she cried, recovering her spirits, ‘ I haven’t been able to dry my clothes and have really nothing to wear.’

‘ I trust there was no more serious reason why I did not have the pleasure of seeing you last night.’

This was turning the tables with a vengeance. Why, the man had persistently kept out of the way, and frustrated all her endeavours to see him !

‘ Well,’ she said demurely, ‘ I scarcely felt well enough to appear, but my sister came on deck a score of times, for the purpose of thanking a certain gentleman, who has placed us both under great obligations.’

‘ I am afraid you got me there,’ he replied ; ‘ but now we will make a truce, and you must not think anything more of my bungling attempts at getting ladies out of the water.’

‘ I shall think of it to my dying day,’ she interrupted fervently, looking him straight in the eyes with her own overflowing.

‘ Good-morning, Mr. Grantley,’ said a voice at this opportune moment, and Mrs. Ingleton sailed up. ‘ You must allow me to join my thanks to my sister’s for all that we owe you.’

‘ Which you can best repay by never recurring to it. Miss Ingleton has already overwhelmed me with thanks for doing what any man with a grain of presence of mind would have done.’

‘ But the individual with the necessary grain is not always available,’ she answered, ‘ or may, perhaps, not be provided

with another even higher quality. No, Mr. Grantley, don't affect to undervalue the service you have conferred upon two women travelling alone. Now, Clara, there is the breakfast bell ; I 'll leave you to the care of one who has proved himself so capable, and go for my blessed children.'

From this to the end of the journey Roland was almost constantly in the society of the ladies. Day after day he sat with Miss Ingleton on the deck, as the steamer glided along the winding river. It was, indeed, pleasant for the lonely man to be brought into contact with this charming girl, and if he could, under her benign influence, forget the hitherto unforgettable past, why should he not ? He knew it was but for a brief period ; she would go her way and he his. As for seeking her love when he had none to give, that thought he never entertained, nor did he dream that there was any danger of her loving him. It was simply that by the force of circumstances they were thrown together for a short time, after which they would part, probably never to meet again.

Mrs. Ingleton generally remained with them, and, being a good conversationalist, she also occupied much of Grantley's attention. So the hours flew by till they entered on the broad breast of the mighty Murray, the milky-white water of the Darling showing in strong contrast to its clear tide for many miles after the junction.

Grantley had been up and down the river before, but for his companions there were many points of new interest to see—the great, grey, perpendicular cliffs, torn, jagged, and honeycombed in the course of untold ages into all manner of fantastic shapes ; and, again, the capricious twists of the river itself, with its walls of tall, straight-stemmed gum-trees lining either bank.

Clara was never tired of hearing Roland talk of his over-land experiences and adventures down the great, long stream, in the days when the savage was a power in the land, and a terror that the white man, in all the pride of his superiority, had to recognise. On the broad river, now in high flood,

there was no dangerous navigation, and the energetic Tongs steamed on night and day, never stopping except to take in wood. The whistle at short intervals sounded its pæan of triumph, wailed like a lost spirit, or shrieked out its shrillest defiance. The captain never slept, or if he did, no one knew when or how. He seemed to be always at the wheel. He steered the boat, ate, drank, prayed, and, on occasion, swore there with undiminished force, but with all these multifarious occupations he appeared like a man only half satisfied. In this wide stretch of water and these long reaches, the steering did not occupy his energies sufficiently. Sometimes he even swung the wheel round for sheer lack of employment.

They were now fast nearing the first port of call, and Grantley contemplated taking the coach thence to Adelaide. He knew his fellow-passengers were going on by the steamer, but his time was limited, and he had become weary of the monotony of the life on board the boat. On the last evening, as he sat on deck with Miss Ingleton, who was unusually silent, possibly thinking he would soon have left them, he said, after a long pause—

‘I have to thank you for making a river-trip, for the first time, really enjoyable to me.’

‘I should like to know, Mr. Grantley, if you really mean what you say. I feel sure it is only a polite phrase such as men always use when the hour for parting is near. I am not vain enough to believe I have ever exercised, or ever shall exercise, the slightest influence on the life of a single human being.’

He looked at her with a surprised air.

‘That is rather a bitter speech for one so young; you must be greatly valued and loved in your own family circle, as you certainly are by your sister-in-law here.’

She turned away impatiently, as she replied—

‘Oh, Agnes and I are very affectionate sisters, and the children are fond of me too, and, of course, that ought to be quite sufficient, as indeed it is. What more can any reasonable woman want?’

‘Well, every reasonable woman may look forward to being married, as doubtless you will be some day, and I shall envy the happy man.’

‘Not you. You will neither envy that mythical individual—for he certainly does not exist—nor even think of me again after to-night.’

‘That’s unkind,’ he rejoined, ‘I don’t so easily forget those I have had so much pleasure in knowing.’

‘Forgive me,’ she exclaimed ; ‘I hardly know what I am saying to-night.’

Then, in little more than a whisper, she added, ‘I am thinking where I should have been but for you.’

‘Miss Ingleton,’ he said, and the change in his tone made her start, ‘I will tell you a story. Years ago a boy was thrown friendless on the shores of South Australia. When in the last extremity, his life was saved by a mere child, it does not matter how. He was taken in by the relatives of that little girl, cared for, protected, fed, and later started in business. The boy and girl grew up together, she good and beautiful, with no other companions of their own age. You may guess the result ; they could not do less than love each other, but you will never know the intensity of that passion. Once again the boy, now a man, was in dire peril, not only of death but of dishonour ; once again the girl, now a woman, by personal risk and heroism of which there are few parallels, saved him. After all this, surely there should have been a happy ending, according to the story-books ; but it was not to be. They were severed, why and how it is needless to relate. It is enough to say that she was blameless ; all your sex, at least, would say so. She married, and he went out into the Australian interior, away from all old associations, trying in vain to forget. One thing he knows now, though it was not necessary to spend years in the solitary bush to learn that—he has no love to give to any other woman, and he is not base enough to deceive and marry her without.’

She had listened, weeping silently. He now took her hand, pressed it, and was gone.



Late that night the *Plover* stopped to meet the mail for the capital, and Roland Grantley took a seat thereon.

‘I’ll take you up or down for nothing any time,’ said Captain Tongs, ‘and welcome.’

‘That’s kind, but I won’t come unless you’ll promise not to blow that infernal whistle more than twice every hour ; I don’t mind the swearing.’

The master laughed, and they parted. Going on board immediately, he blew the whistle long and loud, with extraordinary flourishes and variations, while the steamer wound round a great bend in the river, as a farewell salute and sign of friendship to the passenger by the night-coach.

Lying sleepless in bed, Clara Ingleton knew what it meant, and that the man she had learned to love was gone and she must forget him. No, she would never forget him ; he had saved her life and, until she had forced her company upon him, had held aloof. It was her own fault, and to her last hour she would think kindly of him, which meant, of course, that she would go on loving him secretly and never, no never, marry any one else. Poor little girl ! there are many happy days in store for you ; so dry your eyes and look hopefully forward to fulfilling woman’s highest destiny as the friend, counsellor, and comforter of man and the mother of his children. But such sweet dreams do not come to-night, nor for many more : for she finds it hard to think without pain of the interesting stranger who has crossed her path so pleasantly, only to disappear and leave an aching void in her heart.

## CHAPTER XV

### ROLAND LOSES A FRIEND

A MONTH later Roland Grantley was on the same coach as evening fell, speeding into the town of Wentworth. On the box-seat with him sat our old friend Mr. Danker, a little older

and sparer in frame, but just the same frank, good-humoured person that he always was.

‘Here we are at the Junction once more, Roland, my boy, though I suppose, now I am going to be one of your Riverine squatters, I must conform to present usages and call it Wentworth.’

They had come up from Adelaide together, Grantley on his way back to Moolahalla and his friend to take delivery of a station he had purchased in the back-country.

‘It’s a bit different,’ replied the other reflectively, ‘since we first camped our mob of cattle where the town now stands. Ah well, the noble savage won’t keep us awake to-night.’

‘For which I feel very thankful,’ said Danker, ‘for two nights without sleep on this coach is enough to tire anybody ; of course, I don’t reckon Tom here, because he revels in it. I’m told, Tom,’ addressing the driver, ‘that you are looking forward to having a nap for a few hours when your three years’ contract is up, unless the Government renew it !’

The great rough Jehu grinned, and being a man of few words, merely observed—

‘The durned fools in the town must be talking some blasted rot or other !’

‘Now, Tom,’ continued Mr. Danker, ‘we are approaching the purlieus of the important city that is to be, and you had better prepare for the dash with which you invariably begin and end a journey, or a change, in the delusive hope, I suppose, that passengers will be such blockheads as to believe you ever rise to any pace above a jog trot when you are once out of sight.’

Quite impervious to the sarcasm, Tom straightened himself, shook the reins, and, with a few sharp cuts of his formidable whip, set his team off at a gallop.

‘Handsomely done,’ said Danker, ‘and I don’t mind standing a drink to mark my appreciation,’ as, after a furious flight of short duration under the guiding hands of the taciturn coachman, the vehicle drew up at the door of Gunn’s Hotel.

'I'll say this for Tom,' observed the same gentleman later in the evening, 'he drives the most untrained, unbroken, vicious lot of brutes I ever sat behind, and yet gets through to time better than any man in the country.'

'I haven't one in my crowd as bad as the grey Mallee mare in Steve's lot; look out for her to-morrow, if she is put in. My opinion is she ought to be shot,' growled Tom.

'Luckily my life is insured,' laughed Danker. 'None the less, I'll be on the watch for the wild Mallee mare. I'm off to bed now to make up arrears of sleep.'

Next morning the Darling coach came round as soon as an early breakfast was over. It was driven by a slight young fellow, the Steve of yesterday's conversation. The parcels and luggage were put in and away it went on to the punt, to be ferried across the river. That accomplished, the passengers took their places, and the team rolled it quietly away.

'Are your prads all as tractable as these?' asked Mr. Danker.

'Not quite, sir,' said Steve, 'but most of them are right enough, though sometimes when they have a long spell on good feed they get too big for their skins to hold them, and give a little trouble.'

Nothing more passed on the subject, and, as at the two changes during the day, each team started with only the usual plunge and dash, Mr. Danker forgot his apprehensions, and indeed the very existence of the ill-famed mare. At dusk they arrived at a small public-house on the river-bank, where they stayed for supper and fresh horses. At the end of the next stage it was customary to stop for the night, and, as they were well up to time thus far, they anticipated a successful day's journey.

There were several roughs drinking in the bar, and one woman better known than esteemed, but they were kept out of the dining-room, and as the viands were good, the travellers made a hearty meal. That over, the signal was given 'All aboard.' It was a dark night as Danker and Grantley took

their accustomed seats on the box, while the woman just mentioned and the two men got inside the coach. The driver already occupied his post holding the wheelers.

The leaders, an unruly pair, were then brought out and quickly attached, and the word to let them go was about to be given when there came a sound of horses' feet on the still night air, and three or four horsemen rapidly rode up.

'Bail up,' commanded a loud voice, as, revolver in hand, a tall and powerful man rode up to one side of the coach, 'and hand out the mail-bags.'

'Or lose the number of your mess,' added Cowler's snarling tones from the other side; sending a cold shiver through Grantley's frame as he heard them.

The men, who were clinging to the animals of the team with all the desire to obey, were scarcely able, however, to hold them. They had taken fright, and the near leader, none other than the famous wild Mallee mare, a fiery grey, plunged forward with a tremendous bound, that broke the link coupling her swingle-bar to the main one, thus throwing her whole weight on to the reins, and plucking the coachman out of his seat between the wheelers. Danker, who sat next him, with the true instinct of an old driver, snatched at the falling ribbons, but in vain—they were gone; and away into the black night at headlong speed rushed the maddened horses entirely uncontrolled and uncontrollable, while several shots fired by the bushrangers rang out in their wake.

A little to the left was the Darling bank, a perpendicular depth of sixty or seventy feet, and directly in front a thick forest of crooked leaning box-trees, through which it was impossible the coach could pass without being dashed to pieces.

Both the men sitting there had experienced many perils, but never one more imminent than this. Each moment the line of bent timber and the precipice grew nearer, every second the gallop became swifter. Death by the fall down the one or the crash among the other seemed certain. Brains are active in moments of danger; and, though well knowing the

risk he ran, Roland decided to spring off, and trust to escaping the bushrangers in the darkness.

Light and active as he was, he landed on his feet, but was instantly turned over by the impetus on to his head, and would probably have been killed, but for a tall, stiff hat he was wearing. Even with the protection this afforded him, the shock nearly stunned him. Danker followed, but being heavier and less agile, did not fare so well. As Grantley picked himself up he saw him hurled along the ground, and when he staggered to him his friend was lying bareheaded, motionless, and unconscious.

A little to the right the freebooters passed in pursuit of the flying coach, without observing them. Presently Roland coo-eed for assistance, and Steve, who, with the luck of the bush-whip, had fallen exactly between the polers, the vehicle going over him without inflicting a scratch, ran up, and under their united care the injured man recovered his senses. He managed to walk back to the hotel, but complained of great pain in his head, vomiting afterwards coming on ; and they had scarcely succeeded in getting him to a bedroom before he relapsed into insensibility again, with loud stertorous breathing.

Steve now went out to try and ascertain what had become of the lost vehicle, and Grantley was left alone with his dying friend, for whom he felt there was little hope, as he knew enough of surgery to be aware that the symptoms were very unfavourable.

Meantime the drunken debauch in the bar continued, assisted once more by the presence of the female passenger and her companions, who had hastily dropped out at the coach-door as soon as the bushrangers rode up. They were, however, loudly complaining of terrible injuries, requiring the inward application of various stimulants, though, of course, they were really unhurt. In vain Grantley indignantly expostulated at the noise they made ; they refused to believe Mr. Danker was seriously hurt, and proposed that he should be brought in to join their carousal.

Later on, the landlady became furiously jealous of the frowsy passenger, and torrents of foul language and mutual vituperation were poured out of each hag's lips ; oaths were followed by blows ; these again by maudlin reconciliation, which was soon, however, interrupted by a general free fight.

Nothing further was seen of the bushrangers, and as the mail-driver could not find the coach, he returned to watch with Grantley by the bedside of the sufferer, neither of them being able to exercise the slightest influence over the riotous crew, who carried on their orgies with redoubled frenzy.

At about three o'clock in the morning, when the pandemonium was at its height, Roland noticed a difference in his friend's breathing, and, bending over him, saw that his eyes were open, as it seemed with a look of recognition in them ; then the light passed out of them for ever, and one of the truest of comrades and staunchest of friends had gone on the last long journey.

With reverent hands Grantley closed the eyes and straightened the limbs on the couch ; then he went out sick at heart, with the noise of the carousal striking louder than ever on his ears. At the outer door he met the woman of the house, who staggered up, and, with a drunken leer, stammered out the words—

‘ How is Mr. Danker ? ’

‘ Dead ! ’ said Roland sternly.

‘ Dead ! ’ repeated the woman, half-sobered by the shock.

‘ Yes, dead in a vile scene like this, among a lot of abandoned wretches who, like yourself, disgrace humanity.’

Then he left her, and passed the rest of the night in pacing about in the open.

Such was the miserable end of Andrew Danker : yet who can tell that he was conscious of his horrible surroundings ? His sufferings were probably not great, and it may be that he entered the mysterious unknown as peacefully as the man who dies with weeping kin and friends ranged round his couch.



SETTLER'S CAMP

PHOTO: S. A. GOVT.





On Grantley, however, his death, in the midst of the disgusting scenes which were being enacted in the small building, made a profound impression. He mourned for the esteemed friend and companion whom he had known so long and intimately, and his sorrow was intensified by the feeling that he died in such revolting circumstances. The landlord, when the morning came, though still a drunken, sodden wretch, attempted to make excuses; but he was repulsed with bitter, scathing language and contemptuous loathing. Fortunately, a steamer came up, and the captain at once consented to take the body to Pooncarrie township.

'I shall thus, thanks to your kindness,' Roland said to the master, 'be able to take my poor friend out of this horrible place and give him decent burial.'

The broken coach had been found with the two dead wheelers, one on either side of a sloping tree-trunk. The leaders were gone, nor were they recovered for several days. The top of the vehicle had been swept down, showing that, if the box passengers had retained their seat, in all probability they would have been killed. The mail-bags were torn open and rifled by the bushrangers, who were said to have obtained a considerable amount of booty. It was ascertained afterwards that, after effecting their purpose, they immediately left that part of the country, and, no police being near, pursuit was not attempted.

On following the wheel-marks, it appeared that close to the edge of the thick timber the runaway team had swerved round away from the river and forest, no doubt in consequence of the near leader, the Mallee mare, having nothing to pull because of the breaking of the coupling, and thus going at a greater speed than the animal alongside her. It was, indeed, the well-known mare of evil repute, of which Tom had warned the dead man, that had caused the catastrophe, probably excited further by the arrival of the bushrangers. Steve had said nothing; he did not wish to alarm the passengers by mentioning that the unruly, vicious brute would be one of the team, until they were under way and the danger over.

He had driven her often before, and, though she gave more trouble on each succeeding occasion, he did not like to incur the imputation of being afraid. Every precaution was taken, however; the other horses were quiet, and two additional men were employed to attach the traces, while the ostler kept a firm grip of the mare's head.

Unfortunately, when all was ready, there came the 'Bail up!' of the bushrangers; but even then all might have been well, if the coupling link had resisted that awful plunge; the driver was both cool and skilful, and, once started, the galloping team might have been safely guided along the open track until exhaustion tamed them down to easy control.

Grantley heard all these particulars after his friend had been consigned to his grave, and when he and Steve were continuing their journey and sadly talking over the mournful events of that miserable evening.

'I'll never drive the brute again on any account,' said the latter. 'As it is, I almost feel like a murderer, because Tom has often told me she would kill somebody.'

Roland did not reply, not wishing to add to the deep regret the driver evidently felt; but he could not help thinking how culpably mad it was to harness to a coach on a dark night a dangerous brute like the notorious Mallee mare.

'That makes another account for me to settle with Dan Cowler,' he thought, 'when time and opportunity serve, and it shall not be my fault if it isn't soon. I don't suppose those shots were fired for the special purpose of killing me, or that the dog knew I was there, or he would have searched about and finished me.'

They were now winding round a curve of the river along some high cliffs that overhung the water far below, and began talking of the madness produced in horses by eating the Darling pea, which grew green and luxuriant in the rich meadow-land beneath.

'Some,' said Steve, 'are rendered stupid by it—they keep fat, but lose all their spirit; others are downright mad, and do all sorts of silly things, even trying to climb trees;

generally, when they become as bad as that, they soon die.'

'I have only seen a few affected,' answered Grantley; 'the plant only grows in small quantities on the Upper Darling, not sufficient to do any injury.'

'They all get it here,' replied the coachman, 'if allowed to run on the river-flats when the pea is in season. There are lots of tales told of the queer things they do when seriously affected. They say there is a cranky horse running out back here in the mallee that comes in to water on that big cliff—at least, he thinks he does. He is a pure white, and can be seen any night, sometimes earlier, sometimes later, but he never fails to come and bend over the precipice, making as though he drank, though the water is two hundred feet below; after which he goes away into the scrub again, as if satisfied.'

'Have you ever seen him?' asked the traveller.

'No; but I don't often pass this part after dark.'

'Do you believe he is a real or a phantom horse?'

'I'm blown if I know!' said Steve, 'but the darned yarn has been dinned into my ears till I think there must be something in it; anyhow, I like to have a passenger when I go by here at night. Now, then, my beauties!' and the long whip cracked, and over a good road the pace increased to ten miles an hour.

'You don't go beyond Minindie?' asked Grantley later, as evening closed in and they approached that would-be 'city set on a hill.'

'No,' replied the driver; 'it's quite enough for any man to tool a team between here and Wentworth every week. Tom used to go right on to Wilcannia; but he's a bullock. Six hundred miles every week, all the year round, he did.'

'And yet he is alive,' was the answer, 'and never says anything about it, even when he is drunk; at least, so I am told, for I never saw him in that exalted condition. There are the township lights. I hope, Steve, when you and I travel together again we may have a pleasanter journey.'

Three days later Roland Grantley arrived at Moolahalla.

## CHAPTER XVI

## THE DEATH OF CAPTAIN THUNDERBOLT

MONTHS passed, and the prosperous squatter was still fully engaged with his station duties. The cattle and sheep were increasing so fast that the small number of white men employed had a hard life of it, and the blacks certainly got off not one whit easier. Roland, almost unaided, did the superintendence, and much of the active work also, sometimes riding two or three horses a day almost to a standstill. Careful selection was made through the flocks and herds, and the inferior animals were sent away to market, now that the season was favourable, as, indeed, had regularly been the case in previous years, when the roads were open. Prices ruled high, and the results were extremely satisfactory. There was also every prospect of a splendid clip of wool after such a magnificent year.

Most of the pressing work had been got through, when rumours came of the bushrangers sticking up stations higher up the river. At first these were received with incredulity, as it had been generally believed that the freebooters had finally left the country. Then followed a well-authenticated account of a mail-coach having been stopped and robbed by masked men, supposed to be members of the same band who had shot Sergeant M'Cabe and subsequently stuck up Moolahalla and ill-treated its owner.

Grantley silently made his preparations, and the day following mounted the Star and, accompanied by Jollyboy, took his departure up the river. No one knew his errand, and, though he carried arms, it was done so unostentatiously as to excite little remark. The black boy rode a good horse, and they made such long stages that in three days they arrived in the vicinity of the supposed haunts of the outlaws. As evening closed in they fortunately fell in with Inspector Hilton and two police-troopers, with whom they camped.

That night Roland learned from the officer that the

bushrangers, four in number, had called at a small isolated public-house the previous day and enjoyed themselves, standing treat for three or four hours to all comers. There had been much bounce that the — police and squatters combined dared not meet them, and from hints dropped it appeared likely that they intended sticking up Tailla homestead.

‘It is very lucky I have met you, Mr. Grantley, as the rest of my force, including the black tracker, I despatched yesterday on what I now fear is a false scent across the river. I am, therefore, more than ever delighted to receive you as a volunteer; and your boy, who I know is an excellent tracker, will enable us to follow up the quarry hot-foot to-morrow.’

‘Of one thing I should like to be assured,’ replied Roland, ‘just to whet my ardour. Is the evil-looking scoundrel who escaped with the wounded leader from the encounter on the Warrego with these fellows?’

‘I believe he is,’ said Hilton, ‘from what I heard to-day; but I am not certain. There was a man like him, and just as surly and ill-tempered.’

‘I am your man,’ said Grantley, ‘and when I begin you may depend on me; but I confess my sole object is to bring that villain Cowler to account.’

‘I quite understand,’ replied the other; ‘and, if you will tackle him, my men and I will answer for the rest, unless they have all the luck and the cover too.’

A careful watch was kept throughout the night to guard against the possibility of a surprise, but it passed without anything transpiring to excite alarm.

In the morning an early start was made, and in a short time the tracks of the enemy were picked up, making straight out to a range of hills. About midday the party approached them, and then it became necessary to exercise caution so as not to fall into an ambuscade. The track led up a gully in the range, some parts of which were so narrow that a few well-armed and determined men might

defy thrice their number. None the less, the party pushed on until the pass was covered over with thick timber, when the Inspector became exceedingly uneasy and halted his band.

‘This is risking too much,’ he said to Grantley. ‘If they catch us in a place like this, or even like some that we have come through, they can pop us off from the rocks without our being able to fire a shot.’

Jollyboy heard the remark.

‘No good pull away like it this,’ he said; ‘you all about sit down long bush; mine go long mountain, first time make-a-light (see) white fellow, then come back yabber (tell).’

‘Can you trust him?’ asked Hilton.

‘I will answer for that,’ replied Grantley.

‘Go on, then, my boy,’ said the officer.

Jollyboy divested himself of nearly all his clothes and his boots, and was soon lost in the low, thick bushes covering the side of the hill. Watching carefully, they presently saw him for a moment on the crest, and then he disappeared. For nearly two hours they waited without hearing a sound except the twitter of the little birds among the leaves or the cry of a hawk circling above them. Suddenly the black startled them by appearing in their midst. The police, indeed, instinctively raised their weapons, to the delight of Jollyboy, who showed every gleaming tooth in his head in triumph at the surprise he had given them.

‘That one white fellow pull away,’ he said; ‘mine been make-a-light camp. You come along now.’

When on the way his master elicited that the bushrangers had left their stronghold about two hours before, their tracks making for the opposite side of the range.

‘That one Cowler there, mine think it,’ he continued, with a significant look at his master; ‘mine been seeum track belonging to him.’

Grantley spoke a few sentences to the boy in his own language, and then said to the Inspector—

‘We are just about two hours behind them. They passed

the night behind that knoll in front of us ; and the man I am in search of is one of the gang.'

'Good news,' returned Hilton. 'I know the country on the other side of the hills, and, if we can overtake them there, we have them, as it is fairly open. In these d——d ranges they might give us the slip, though I daresay you, with your grand horse used to cattle-hunting, and the black boy, could give a good account of yourselves.'

'If I can only get within sight of that scoundrel,' answered the squatter, 'I ask no more. Of course, he may shoot me or the Star ; but that's not easy in a hot chase, and I won't give him much leisure to aim.'

'You seem to think they will run rather than fight ?'

'Don't such villains nearly always do so when they are fairly matched and the way is open ?' contemptuously asked Grantley.

'Ay, that is always that sneaking dog Cowler's practice. He never fights when he can run away ; but the big fellow they call Captain Thunderbolt is made of different stuff.'

'He's your business, and I have just enough feeling for him to hope you may shoot him dead ; my man will only get his deserts by being well hanged.'

'Once he is captured, I will answer for that consummation,' said the Inspector.

'There is a little uncertainty even about that, though,' replied Roland. 'We can both call to mind several atrocious scoundrels who have escaped the noose, though their guilt was clearly proved.'

'Notably Dareson—that bloodthirsty, murdering villain, the reputed scion of a noble English family, whom I caught myself. But, after all, what did it matter ? To a man like him it's almost worse to be imprisoned for life. He was like a caged tiger, eager to kill anything ; and once, when he had just done solitary for a week for a savage assault on a warder, he promptly knocked down the next who came near and stamped on him until he killed him.'

'Yet you implied just now that it was not of much import-

ance whether the brute was hanged or not,' observed Roland. 'It seems to me that it was of some consequence to the man he killed, not to mention those he injured. I presume they hanged the wretch to mend matters, and so rapacious justice was at length appeased.'

'Not a bit of it. There was some talk of bringing him to trial, but his mental condition was called in question. His fits of ungovernable rage were considered to denote insanity, and, while the discussion proceeded, Dareson settled the matter by turning up his own toes without the assistance of any one. The man simply could not live in confinement, and it would have been more merciful to have swung him off at first, regardless of the noble relatives' expostulations. Here we are at Thunderbolt and Company's camp; not badly hidden, that "humpy" in the hillside.'

They had wound round the knoll, and stood in a small valley nestling among the hills. It was not above half a mile in length, and much less in breadth; then it abruptly narrowed to a gorge, which presently crept up through a saddle in the range. Along this and over the elevation Jollyboy indicated the tracks would lead them.

The 'humpy' proved to be an excavation in the broken side of the hill, the entrance being closed by slanting timbers covered with earth. Inside it was only a few feet square, but was sufficient to shelter with some degree of comfort four or five men. The officer made a brief inspection.

'Nothing of importance,' he said; 'some rations, clothes, and old fire-arms not of much use. We'll proceed, Mr. Grantley. I expect the proprietors are on some dark deed intent.'

The party again continued, passing up the gorge, Jollyboy leading and following the tracks with the marvellous precision of his race, over the saddle of the range and down a winding valley on the opposite side to the level ground, clothed with thick mulga. From the hill-top they saw the flat country stretching far away to the east, with small plains set in the dull green foliage of the open bush beyond the broad margin of forest that fringed the base of the elevated land on which



they stood. The trail led straight through the wood, and in the softer earth showed distinctly to every member of the band. For some miles not a word was said; then the sergeant observed—

‘The tracks are making directly for Tailla station. Some big improvements have lately been begun there, and these fellows probably expect money may arrive by the mail. It is due there early this evening.’

‘How far is it from here?’ asked Grantley.

‘About twelve miles. If we are not thrown off the scent by hard ground or devilment of some kind, we ought to arrive in good time.’

A flock of sheep crossing the track did, however, delay them considerably, so that it was late in the afternoon when, from the thicket in which they were, the station-building could be distinguished among a grove of eucalyptus trees. A halt was now made and a consultation held as to the best way to approach without attracting the attention of the bushrangers, who, they had every reason to suppose, were in possession of the homestead. To the left the line of timber continued to within a short distance of the buildings, and it was determined to retreat into the cover of the forest and endeavour to reach them unobserved from that direction. The Inspector, who knew the locality, now moved in advance, and, after taking them round a considerable way through comparatively thick scrub, suddenly brought them right in front of the house. Then it at once became evident that the men they sought were not there. Two or three individuals could be seen walking about, who, directly they observed the troop, hastened to meet them.

‘Just in time,’ exclaimed a fine, tall man with a bright, keen manner; ‘the Captain’s gang left us not an hour ago to stick up the mail, which is now overdue.’

‘Have they done you any damage, Mr. Ingleton?’ asked the officer.

‘Nothing particular, except taking all the fire-arms and helping themselves generally to rations, spare cash, clothes, and grog. To finish up with, they drove all the horses away

with them to keep us safe, but of course they will leave them far enough off to be out of our reach.'

'That's a bad job, for I hoped for your assistance in pursuing them.'

'Only too glad,' was the ready reply, 'if I had a nag and shooting-iron, but I'm no use without.'

'The only thing I can do, then, is to send the boy back with the horses, if we find them and require your help. Now we must be off.'

'Do, if you can; and good luck to you,' replied Mr. Ingleton, as they galloped away.

They had scarcely proceeded a couple of miles when a shot rang out, followed by another and another in quick succession. Pressing on, they soon saw what had occurred. By the side of a broken and sparsely timbered dry channel, the mail-coach was pulled up and the traces cut. The driver still sat on the box, holding the reins of the team in front of him; but if he had cared to run at the imminent hazard of having a bullet put through him, which he didn't, he was powerless to move the heavy vehicle.

The letter-bags lay on the ground half-ransacked, while near them stood three of the bushrangers, evidently interrupted in the work of rifling their contents. A little on one side was a fourth, covering the occupants of the coach with a revolver; while, beyond, their horses were fastened to a tree under the high bank, where they had evidently been placed so that they might not be observed until Her Majesty's mail was close up, when the robbers had sprung across the road with levelled weapons.

As soon as the police appeared, the bushrangers dropped over the bank or took shelter behind the trees, the big, dark man already described as the captain having first sternly warned the driver not to attempt to move, at his peril.

'We must dismount,' ordered the Inspector, 'leave our horses with the black boy, and get near the scoundrels under cover; they would pick us off from behind that ditch, if we tried riding up, before we could fire a shot.'

Promptly at the word each man sprang to the ground, and, leaving Jollyboy, who was grinning from ear to ear, in charge of the animals, advanced on the enemy. At first they proceeded rapidly, paying little attention to cover, but presently a trooper was slightly wounded. It then became evident that they had to deal with practised marksmen, and that it was necessary to be prudent.

Grantley's keen eye had early marked his man as the one standing near the coach, and he had seen him retreat over the bank. The leader, disdaining safer position, merely stepped behind a tree and began firing on the police, the officer attracting most of his notice. Both parties were so well concealed and cautious, that the shooting continued for at least half an hour without result. Then Roland, becoming impatient, began to creep up the bed of the creek nearer his foe, firing at every opportunity. He soon saw that Cowler became uneasy at this evidence of implacable determination to kill or capture him, for he more than once sought safer refuge further back. From his last stand he sent a ball within an inch of the squatter's head. The escape was so narrow that Grantley recognised the necessity of greater care, and, watching keenly for an unguarded movement on the part of the robber, he observed an elbow projecting from the trunk of a big tree, behind which he knew he lay. Aiming truly and steadily, he fired, when the limb appeared to sink lower, exposing more of the body. Again he fired; surely now he had got the ruffian. Just then he heard a cry from Jollyboy—

‘Boree yan!’ (The white devil is going).

In a flash of thought he understood the trick and that his enemy was escaping. The same thought seemed to strike Thunderbolt, for with a loud oath he turned round in time to see the traitor mounted on his horse speeding across the plain. In his surprise he unconsciously exposed himself, and a bullet from Hilton's rifle crashed into his brain. Then the troopers rushed in, and the two remaining bushrangers threw up their hands and surrendered.

## CHAPTER XVII

## THE BREAK-UP OF THE GANG

ROLAND, engrossed with the one thought that his foe was escaping, and scarcely noticing the fall of the leader of the bushrangers, ran for his horse to give chase. Jollyboy on his part had watched the combat with absorbing interest. Himself out of range of the bullets, it was a new and delightful sensation to see the white man use his deadly fire-arms against men of his own colour. But for the fact that his master was with them, all his sympathies would have been inimical to the police and with the freebooters, as the guardians of law and order inspired more terror than affection among his people.

When, however, Cowler in that cowardly manner sneaked out of the fight, leaving his mates to their fate, he recognised that it would be a reflection upon his keen sight and reputation as a tracker if he allowed such tactics to be adopted without giving warning. Besides, he had observed the ruse practised to outwit his employer, and that could not be suffered to succeed ; had it been one of the troopers who had been deceived, Jollyboy would have been looking the other way. Until the robber mounted (taking his chief's horse, as better than his own), he did not divine that his object was flight, and this gave the villain the advantage of a start.

Accordingly he gave the alarm, and hastily tying up the other horses, jumped on his own and set off in pursuit, to keep the fugitive in sight, knowing that Mr. Grantley would instantly follow. With all his haste, it took the latter some time to reach the Star and detach the reins from those of the others ; but, once on his back, he dashed across the dry creek at a pace that augured ill for Dan Cowler's chance of eluding capture.

Nearly two miles in front of him on the plain was the black boy, and fully as far beyond him there rose a little cloud of dust covering the course of the ruffian, to bring whom to

justice Roland felt almost willing to give his life. Evidently he was making for the ranges, and once in them, with darkness setting in, he would be safe; probably he would even escape if he could only reach the fringe of thick timber lining their base. Grantley set his teeth hard, and, sitting down on his horse, set himself to ride a long waiting race, to be successful in which he must gauge the speed and endurance of the Star to a fraction.

'There is not another horse in Riverina,' he muttered, 'that can keep up this pace for twelve miles, and those hills are not a yard nearer.'

On, on, he could see the space dividing him from Jollyboy perceptibly decrease, though the boy rode the second-best hack of all the good steeds on Moolahalla. The close, dark, well-defined wall of forest, too, was rapidly nearing, and almost on its verge a black spot was seen making impatiently for its shelter. A few more strides and the Star was racing neck and neck with his companion, the blackboy's horse, which was for a moment excited by generous equine emulation to redoubled exertion, but which soon fell behind, unable to sustain the strain.

'Follow on, to the last,' said his master to Jollyboy in a hoarse whisper, as he passed him.

Afterwards, when telling the thrilling tale, many a time and oft, by the camp-fire, to his admiring fellow-countrymen, with numerous embellishments, Jollyboy invariably wound up with the remark—

'My word, that one 'Tar balara murray yarraman, close up cunika,' meaning that he had the speed of lightning.

A wild exhilaration fired Grantley's blood, more exciting than any he had ever felt when crashing through the thick, stiff mulga or mallee scrub at headlong speed after the wild bush-cattle. For a while he grasped the saddle with his knees and drove the Star at his utmost pace, determined to come up with the bushranger before he entered the forest.

The fugitive, too, rode a magnificent animal, taken by the man who now lay dead by the dry creek back yonder from

one of the best studs in New South Wales ; but the great horse behind him now covered four yards to his three. Into the bush they plunged at length, and, as they did so, the pursuer could see the terror depicted on his enemy's aspect. He had turned in his saddle to fire, in the vain hope that the shot might wound horse or man and check pursuit. Oh that he could send a bullet into that gleaming white star, or into the stern, resolute face of the rider ! Again and again he fired, but the distance was too great, or his hand too unsteady from the motion ; yet he dared not stay to take aim.

Then the crashing boughs and line of dust alone showed the path of the flying outlaw.

The sun had set, and in that forest land, beneath those close, overhanging boughs, it was almost dark. But, reckless of all but the fact that the man he had sworn to be avenged upon was before him, and on the threshold of escape, the squatter dashed forward.

Presently the trees became smaller and more bush-like, and the ground stony and rising. Shots were now frequently exchanged ; but on horse-back at full speed, and more particularly in timber, only the most expert of marksmen can shoot straight with a revolver, except by the merest fluke.

They were already mounting the hillside, approaching the rocks which the fugitive intended to throw himself amongst and fly on foot, and his horse was labouring heavily. A few more yards and he would be safe. He twisted round in his seat and hurled his empty weapon with vindictive force at his pursuer. It caught him on the right arm, raised to defend his head, and dashed his pistol from his hand, for a moment paralysing the limb, and all but tumbling him from his saddle ; but the Star swept on unchecked, and in another moment the foes were side by side. Dropping his rein, Roland struck out with his clenched left hand, straight and true, at the bushranger's scowling face, and dashed him to the ground, stunned and motionless.

It was well for the conqueror he did so, for, though the

exhausted horse of the fallen man stopped nearly dead in his tracks, the impetus of his speed carried the Star many yards on, with his rider utterly defenceless. But there was no timely recovery for the unconscious ruffian, and long before he could recall his scattered senses Roland returned to the spot ready to finish his work. With a savage joy he snapped the same pair of handcuffs, from which he himself had been delivered by Miola, on the powerless wrists of the unhappy wretch, and then stood over him to wait for assistance.

Jollyboy came first, and the prisoner was secured beyond the hope of escape, never more to roam the boundless wilds of broad Riverina. His Nemesis had found him, and by the hands of the man he hated more than any other. Ah, but for that d—d fleet horse he would have reached the rocks, and there at least have been a match for his enemy. Up among them he could have found a sheltered spot, where a store of fire-arms was hid, from which he might have shot down the detested squatter and all who followed him as they approached.

As he cowered on the ground some such thoughts as these passed in a confused way through the brigand's bewildered brain, while his captor stood by, stern and silent, his glance wandering from the captive to the horses, gasping for breath with heaving flanks and distended nostrils. Suddenly the Star cocked his pointed ears and gazed down upon the mass of woodland below. Then came on the breeze a faint 'coo-ee' far away in the depths of the leafy maze, and Roland knew that the Inspector was running their trail. Loudly he returned the signal, while the black boy set fire to a bush.

Attracted by the sound and the glare, it was soon evident, from the crash of sticks and the clatter of galloping hoofs, that some one was approaching them, and in a few minutes the officer rode up. A glance was sufficient to take in the whole scene.

'I congratulate you, Mr. Grantley, on having performed a splendid feat in pursuing and capturing that man when he had so great a start. I scarcely hoped you would be successful,

though I felt there was a chance with that grand animal of yours.'

'What about the others?' asked Roland.

'The captain is shot dead and the remaining two are taken. By-the-by, there were two ladies and a couple of children in the coach all the time, but they were so dreadfully frightened during the firing that they never put their heads out; indeed, I believe one was in a dead faint.'

'Who were they?' asked Grantley, 'and what have you done with the prisoners?'

'I only waited,' returned Hilton, 'to secure the bush-rangers and make certain the leader was dead before racing after you; but I could see some of the Station people coming, so I left orders for all to go on there, where we will follow them.'

The dejected robber was made to mount his horse, the animal being led by Jollyboy, while Grantley and the Inspector rode close behind. Hilton was in high spirits. Promotion and the high reward offered for arresting such noted offenders and breaking up the most notorious gang that ever terrorised New South Wales could not fail to be his; for, of course, Mr. Grantley was too much of the gentleman to touch blood-money. The black boy certainly would not be actuated by any such scruples, but then he could be easily satisfied.

The squatter quickly set these misgivings at rest by warmly congratulating him on his prospects, at the same time protesting that, as his object was now accomplished, his interest in the matter was over, and he wished to return home without delay, and not appear more than was absolutely necessary in the subsequent proceedings.

'Surely nothing more will be required than to say that the flying ruffian was caught after an exciting chase and brought back by Inspector Hilton.'

'There is no occasion to detain you,' answered that officer. 'I should be ungrateful indeed if I put you to any inconvenience after the great service you have rendered both the police force and the country. I purpose taking my prisoners on by





JUNCTION OF THE MURRUMBIDGEE



MURRUMBIDGEE



the coach to-morrow, so as to lose no time in relieving myself of the responsibility of their safe-keeping.'

'I am afraid,' said Grantley, 'I cannot claim merit for patriotism, but must admit that I fought for my own hand.'

'It does not in the least matter what was your motive. It ought surely to be sufficient to know that, without your valuable assistance, Thunderbolt and his gang would be at their devil's work still.'

'Do you know,' replied Grantley, 'I feel half sorry for that courageous scoundrel, and yet it is better to be decently shot than ignominiously hanged.'

'Tastes differ,' was the cool answer; 'I should have preferred taking him on alive; but the reward is just the same in either case, and the community is well rid of a pest. Such skunks as this in front of us are never very dangerous, unless they form part of a band with a bold fellow, like the captain, as leader.'

'Have you a strong case against this Dan Cowler?'

'Strong enough to hang him a dozen times,' said Hilton. 'The sergeant he shot on the Warrego will probably be the particular charge we shall rely upon, but there are several others quite as bad.'

'I hope I shall never see his face again, that's all,' replied the squatter. 'There are the Station lights and I'm glad of it, for my arm feels stiff and sore where he struck me with the revolver.'

A few moments more and they were being welcomed by the owner with true bush hospitality. On hearing of Grantley's injury, he insisted on applying hot fomentations, which quickly had a marked effect in allaying the inflammation. This done, the patient, with his arm in a sling, was ushered into a well-lighted and comfortable sitting-room, and, to his intense astonishment, found himself confronted by Clara Ingleton. She came forward at once.

'Oh, Mr. Grantley, you have again laid me under a load of obligation. How can we—how can I—ever hope to repay you?'

'I am quite at a loss,' he answered. 'In what way have I merited these thanks?'

'Why, don't you know,' she cried, 'that Mrs. Ingleton and I were in the coach stuck up by those horrid bushrangers, when you, like a gallant knight, came to our rescue.'

'And then ran away,' he replied, 'leaving to others the pleasing duty of relieving you. No; I only learned there were ladies in the vehicle when returning from the pursuit of the worst villain of the lot, and even then had no idea that you were one of them.'

'And if you had known it,' she involuntarily asked, 'would that have checked the ardour of your hot chase?'

'Not a bit,' he said frankly; 'I had an account to settle with that man, and I can imagine nothing that I would have permitted to interfere with my doing so.'

There was such a bitter intensity in his tone, that she looked at him with a startled surprise.

'Is it settled? and are you any the happier?'

'That is a double-barrelled question, but I'll answer both parts at once. When it's finally settled, I shall be satisfied.'

'And when will that be?'

'When he's hanged,' he replied, almost fiercely.

She recoiled from him with mingled horror and astonishment. When she had travelled with him, during that happy three weeks on the river-steamer, she saw no signs of this suppressed vindictive passion. Now she noticed that his arm was in a sling.

'I hope you are not wounded,' she said, 'whatever may have been your motive in hunting down the unfortunate man.'

'It is nothing,' he answered, 'not even caused by a shot; simply a commonplace bruise, which will probably be well to-morrow. But how is it you are so little upset by this most unpleasant affair? and Mrs. Ingleton, how is she?'

'Oh, I am an Australian girl, whose susceptibilities are not too acute or sensitive to prevent me from quickly recovering from a fright. As to my sister-in-law, she fainted at the

first fire, and I was too much frightened to be of any use. Each time there was a report from a rifle or revolver, I just covered my ears up, but all the same I couldn't help looking out through the window. I saw the bushranger ride away, and you follow on that beautiful horse. Then the Inspector came up and told us that all was over, that the leader was killed, and the two others had surrendered. While we were collecting our wits a little, my brother arrived on the scene, and of course his wife at once felt safe and consoled. The harness was put to rights and we came on here, my brother declaring that the fight would have been a splendid success, but for the escape of the greatest rascal of the whole crew. Now comes the postscript: you asked, "How is Mrs. Ingleton?"—She is very tired and has gone to bed, leaving me to apologise for her and to act as hostess.'

'It is quite unnecessary to do the former, and nothing could be more charming than the way you do the latter.'

'Very politely and gallantly said, for a man who left us captive in a horrid, stuffy coach, and rode off on his fleet steed on other exploits intent. Here comes my brother, and, as we cannot keep up our enthusiasm, even for heroic deeds, without eating, and dinner is waiting, we will go in to it.'

Grantley now learned that Mr. Ingleton had lately purchased Tailla Station, and that he had been there for several weeks since taking delivery. He had written for his wife and sister, who were staying with friends about a hundred miles distant, to join him there, but did not anticipate their coming for another fortnight.

'I was never more surprised in my life,' he said, 'than when I found them in the mail-coach; but it appears that a young lady, the daughter of their hostess, was attacked by typhoid, and the doctor thought it prudent for all visitors to leave. And now, Mr. Grantley, having explained how it is that we are here to spring such a surprise upon you, though indeed the surprise has been mutual, I must express how deeply I am indebted to you for all your kindness to Mrs. Ingleton and my sister. From them I have heard so much

of you, that I am determined not to relinquish the pleasure of your society, at least until you have recovered from your injuries, and as long after as possible.'

## CHAPTER XVIII

### GHOSTS

WHEN morning came, Inspector Hilton departed with his troopers and the prisoners, the latter in the coach, and in due course delivered them over to the governor of her Majesty's gaol at Bathurst. There they were tried in strict conformity with the law made and provided to deal with such malefactors, and sentenced to death for murder and highway robbery. The governor of the province was pleased, in consideration of the youth of the younger convicts, to commute their sentences to imprisonment for life. But to Cowler there was no leniency shown—his record was of too dark a dye ; and he suffered the extreme penalty of the law, with a curse on Roland Grantley upon his lips. During his life he had been frequently charged with cowardice, and we know he was a low, repulsive ruffian, but it must be allowed that when death came, he met it with fortitude. Some said his kicking his boots off amongst the crowd that surrounded the gallows was mere bravado. Perhaps it was ; in any case the subject is not a savoury one, and it is without regret that we finally part with Mr. Dan Cowler in these pages.

Over-night resolutions may seem to be of the most irrevocable character, but the morning not infrequently alters the most adamant resolve. Grantley had determined to start for home immediately after breakfast, but, to begin with, his arm was still extremely painful and he still felt very tired. Then, again, where was the urgent necessity that he should leave such pleasant quarters in hot haste ? His horses would be all the better for a spell. The latter argument derived additional force from an inspection of Jollyboy's steed, which

showed unmistakable evidence of yesterday's gruelling. Even the steel-wire muscles of the Star gave signs of the great effort of the preceding evening's gallop.

After a careful examination of both animals, the black boy, to his extreme relief, received orders to turn them out in the paddock again, and disport himself as he pleased, which he proceeded to do by going to sleep for most of the day.

Roland was the recipient of much attention and even some petting from the ladies. His arm had to be fomented and bandaged, Miss Clara satisfying herself that the commonest humanity demanded this. He was a guest, and had done them an immense service ; besides, his injury was received in their defence, as it were. She must be civil to him, there could be no doubt of that, while he stayed. This reasoning was most conclusive, but it did not require that Miss Ingleton should feel restless and wander aimlessly about, when the visitor was taken by his host to look at some of the stock and kept out of doors for an unconscionable time, as is the provoking manner of men, particularly squatters.

The afternoon made amends, however, for Mr. Ingleton went off on station business, and the mistress of the house had domestic duties to occupy her, so that the guest was left to the care of the young lady. The situation was thus decidedly favourable to violent love-making ; the wounded hero alone with the rescued damsel in a country house. She, too, was fair to see as any of the bewitching daughters of Eve, as well as bright and animated in manner and conversation ; yet the gallant allowed the day to pass without speaking one word of admiration, still less of love.

As evening fell, he strolled away on the first opportunity by himself, angry and impatient that he was not stirred by her beauty and other attractions.

'It is useless,' he muttered bitterly, 'I shall never more love a woman ; I will bid my latest dream good-bye and leave here to-morrow. If I could but have felt the slightest love, as I understand it, for this girl, I would ask her even yet to be my wife, and honestly try to forget the past, but it cannot

be. In her presence I am only the more reminded of Petrel, and the old, all-absorbing love is strong as ever.'

Long he strove with himself, and, when he returned, it was with a moody brow, and constrained manner. On retiring for the night, he intimated that he must deny himself the pleasure of a further stay, and start for home to prepare for the coming shearing.

To this proposal Mr. Ingleton refused to listen.

'Not at all,' he said, 'you shall remain for a week yet: then I will drive you part of the way; it will be easier than riding, and I am going your way.'

In vain Grantley protested; he simply pooh-poohed all objections, and finally left the room, promising to return in a few moments. Clara, during this colloquy, had passed with an absorbed air out of the open window on to the verandah, where Roland now followed her.

'Miss Ingleton,' he said warmly, 'do not think I am insensible of your kindness, for I deeply feel all that you have done and all that you are willing to do.'

'If we are to believe these protestations,' she replied, affecting a bright tone, 'why are you in so great a hurry to leave us?'

'I left Moolahalla at a very inconvenient time for a specific object, which has been accomplished, and I am now anxious to return to my duties.'

'And we, your old friends, whom you cover with obligations, count for nothing in this rigorous regard for duty?'

For a moment he turned away as if he would have left her; then he came back to her side.

'Miss Ingleton,' he said, 'this afternoon I resisted a great temptation. It was to profess a love I cannot feel. I am a lonely man with a sorrow that never leaves me. From a selfish standpoint it would be pleasant to have some one to love and console me by her sweet and gentle presence. Once I thought of asking you to be my wife, but it would neither be for your happiness nor mine. It is better that I should go, and that you should forget that such a man ever crossed



your path. There is a brighter future in store for you than any it is in my power to offer.'

She leaned on the back of a chair, as if for support, while he spoke, but now drew herself up.

'I will not affect to misunderstand you,' she replied, 'for I owe you too much to do that. I was wrong to wish you to remain after what you told me when we parted last, but there seemed to be a change in you. And—and—forgive me and good-bye!'

When he looked up, she was gone.

\* \* \* \* \*

Roland Grantley slept little that night, but appeared at breakfast fully equipped for the road. Many were the regrets of his host and hostess at his departure, though they ceased to urge his remaining. Clara said nothing on the subject, but with her own pretty hands she prepared some lunch for the traveller, and, when he left, shook hands bravely, as women deeply wounded can do.

She even went out to the Star and patted the arched neck, then, as he bent his proud head towards her, she gently kissed the white star in the broad frontal. It was her last farewell to horse and rider, neither of whom she was to see again. Then she went to her room and from her window watched them fading away in the distance across the plain, all the while silently bidding adieu to her love's young dream. Alas! how different it might have been, both for her and for him, if the Fates had been less inexorable! But not so will the Stern Sisters condone the sins of those who barter away for a mess of pottage, or even vast stores of worldly wealth, the enduring love of a life.

The owner of Moolahalla returned home with very mixed feelings. A profound depression weighed upon him during the whole journey. It was not that he regretted the opportunity which he had thrown away of asking Clara Ingleton to share his lot, for he never doubted such a step would have ended disastrously; but it did seem hard that he could never forget his youthful passion, or even learn to think of it with

composure. It was, however, useless struggling any longer, and he determined that, when shearing was over, he would go down to the old place and see Petrel again. It might be that she had utterly torn him from her heart ; in any case she must be growing old, as women quickly do in hot climates ; perhaps she was a mother, and he smiled sardonically as he thought how the sight of that once perfectly proportioned form grown stout and misshapen must disillusionise him.

Should she, however, be still beautiful as ever and hold the same sway over him, he would sell out and leave the country, taking her with him, if she could be induced to go ; if not, he would go himself, never to return.

Pondering all these things over in his mind as he rode along, he at last braced himself up to the stern resolve.

'She *will* fly with me, or I will cast her image from me and return to ask Clara Ingleton to be my bride. Ten years of the best of my life are gone in vain repining and useless grief. Am I never to cease passionately craving for one woman until my manhood has slipped away ?'

Somehow recently, until the last few days, he had thought less about his lost love, and had really been the happier for it. The hot exciting chase after the bushrangers had fired him as nothing had done for years, more especially the wild ride in pursuit of his mortal enemy. Perhaps, if Clara had not come across his path, he could have become absorbed in matters in which women had no concern. Confound the girl ! He devoutly wished he had never seen her ; he certainly would not have entered the house had he known she was there. Half her sympathies seemed to go with the scoundrelly robbers, and he tried to feel very angry at her, but in spite of repeated protestations to himself that his revenge on that undoubted villain was a just act, he now began to feel less satisfied with regard to it.

'Why the devil could I not have left the dirty work to the police, as others do ?' he muttered. 'But then there are few with such injuries to avenge. It was a case of self-preservation, for while that wretch was alive and at liberty

my life could not be considered safe. So the sooner he meets his fate on the gallows the better.'

All the way home these reflections and others arising from his recent experiences engrossed his attention, but once back at the station he cast them aside and bent his energies to his accustomed work.

There was much to be done in preparation for the shearing season, and, having decided to leave immediately afterwards, he was determined that no avoidable delay should occur in doing so.

It was known on the station that his pursuit of Cowler had resulted in the capture of that desperado, but very few questions were asked of the 'boss,' for, now Mr. Hazle had left, there was no one who felt equal to inviting his confidence. Besides, Jollyboy could supply all the information wanted, and that sable youth had, indeed, a rare time of it. Many were the sticks of tobacco bestowed upon him for a full relation of his adventures, and he soon learned to add a romantic interest to the tale by describing the deliverance of Miss Ingleton.

'My word, that one balara white gin!' he emphatically declared. 'Bale frightened long bushranger.'

As applicants for a 'stand' on the shearing-floor began to camp about, his audiences became more numerous and there was rarely an evening that he was not interviewed by eager listeners, anxious to hear every particular of the break-up of the notorious Thunderbolt's gang. And there were not a few among them whose sympathies were all with the unlucky rogues in their defiance of law and order. To them the squatter's conduct in joining the police was just what might be expected from one of his class. 'Why didn't he leave the d——d bobbies to do their own dirty work?' was the usual comment.

The day before shearing commenced, three men rode up to Grantley as he was giving some directions at the shed. One, a tall sparely-built man, stood a little aside until the others had spoken, and then asked if he could be taken on.

His voice seemed familiar, and a rapid glance at once showed Roland that it was none other than Darkie, though bearded nearly to the waist and with the stamp of years of change and exposure upon him. There were the same furtive eyes, though with a bolder and more confident look in their roaming glance. Never at rest, they took in every detail while men in his company were absorbed in their pipes or any other trivial object. Now, they were alike watching his companions and each motion of Grantley, though the man himself stood nonchalantly by, as if nothing interested him.

Thus met, after long years, the two who had parted so strangely. Each always secretly felt that the time would surely come, if they lived, however it might be deferred, yet to the younger man it came somewhat as a surprise. Of late he had thought less of his quondam companion of other days, and probably felt glad to put from him that episode in his early career in which they were both involved. As the years had rolled on, he learned to doubt the existence of the hidden treasure. Darkie was given to romancing, and, probably, had no real reason for the conclusion he arrived at ; anyhow not sufficient to induce him to risk returning to the colony, where a heavy reward was offered for his apprehension. After the lapse of so long a time there were a hundred chances against his re-appearance. Sickness, death, a home of his own with domestic ties, these and a host of other reasons might prevent the fugitive from ever troubling him again.

So Grantley had half persuaded himself that the past evil deed was buried too deep to be ever disinterred, yet here came the rude awakening from his dream of safety ; not that he contemplated any real danger to his life, if the man were recognised, or even volunteered to turn Queen's evidence after so many years ; but there might be the opprobrium and the disgrace of a judicial inquiry and possibly even the exposure of a public trial.

These reflections passed swiftly through his mind, but he gave no outward indication of alarm. With his usual calmness he took down the names of the first applicants, saying

that places would be preserved for them. Then he mentioned that he required a man to act as 'yarder up' and to drive sheep to and fro between the paddocks and the shearing-shed. A significant glance at Jonathan Quig (for that was the name given by the wanderer) made him at once apply for the position, and, after a few questions respecting his capabilities, to allay any suspicions on the part of the others, Grantley engaged him, thus in a great measure separating him from the shearers, and giving himself opportunities of intercourse with him, without exciting remark.

Then they parted, and for some days Roland only saw his old companion for a few minutes at a time. On one of these occasions, when there was no one by to see or hear, they agreed upon their line of action. Nothing was to be allowed to transpire to lead to the supposition that they had ever met before. They were never to refer to the past or speak of their future proceedings, except when away together on the run. The situation that Jonathan now filled would necessitate his employer's being frequently with him, and even their camping out together at night. On such occasions their plans could be matured, without the possibility of any one knowing or suspecting aught.

About a week later they were alone, and Quig began his tale of the long ride on the Star up the Coorong beach and the midnight swim across the Murray mouth.

'I remembered every word of your directions,' he said, 'and they saved my life in that awful current.'

Then followed a minute and faithful narration of the few days' concealment at the Bluff, and the subsequent attempt when the pursuit became hot to reach Kangaroo Island. In burning words, that stung the remorseful lover like scorpions, he described the devotion and heroism of the intrepid girl, and, as he dwelt upon the theme, a fierce jealousy blazed up in the breast of the listener, as he for the first time realised that this man too had dared to love her.

Then he spoke in low, suppressed accents of the parting at the island, when he had accompanied her fairly out to sea—

'I knew,' he said, 'that all the time she was only thinking of you, and that she would have done as much for any other creature for your sake ; and yet you could submit to be separated from her,' he added in an inquiring and reproachful tone.

For a moment the two men gazed on each other, perhaps nearer a deadly quarrel than ever before during all their strange association.

'Drop these reflections,' sternly broke in Grantley, 'I suffer them from none. What you have heard from others I cannot tell, but from me ask nothing, since it has nought to do with our compact.'

'So be it,' assented the other, 'besides, it is too late now ; but, if aught that I could do, even to the laying down of my life, would serve her, God knows how willingly I would do it.'

Again the fierce spasm of jealousy shot through Grantley, but beyond an impatient gesture he made no sign that he had heard the remark.

'Do you half comprehend what she dared and did ?' continued the narrator, again carried away by his subject. 'She faced a gathering storm in an open boat, with a man she never liked or trusted ; she a young girl fair enough to tempt a saint to sin when alone and absolutely in his power, but the wretch who could have injured her, under such circumstances, must have been a fiend indeed, and yet there are such men !'

'You well know,' angrily retorted Roland, 'that, had you done her the slightest wrong, the world would not have been wide enough for the two of us to live in.'

'Yes, I know it,' sadly assented the other, 'yet you have in some inexplicable way forsaken her. Roland Grantley, mine is a bad enough record to look back upon and those who have benefited me have reaped a poor return, but I would rather answer for all my long and evil catalogue of crime, if there be a judgment-day, than for your treatment of Petrel Cleeve. At your hand she has received the blackest ingratitude for services such as women have rarely rendered to men.'

‘I know it, I have never ceased to remember it all these long years, and shall to my dying day, without any reminder from you. I have borne enough already, and, unless you seek a quarrel, let this pass and recur to the subject no more.’

The words were sternly spoken with a warning ring in them, and, as in the old days, the weaker spirit bent before the stronger will of the younger man.

‘Quarrel with you,’ cried the wanderer with a laugh, ‘not likely, for all the women on the broad earth. No, since we parted I have seen many men under the varied conditions that most try the mettle of mortals, but none to equal you, and, but for what happened on the Tatiara, I should never have left you. That has parted us, and when we have accomplished the purpose for which I have again sought you, we will each go his own way, never to meet again. But that treasure I must find.’

‘What treasure?’ asked Grantley. ‘When we parted, you hinted at a fortune hidden somewhere that might be yours, but I thought little of it, as you could gasconade then. You must be more definite now, if I am to help you.’

Then Darkie told his tale. How, with the hunting party of blacks, he had arrived just in time to save the Jew from being murdered outright, and had distinctly seen Talco snatch and carry away the small brass box which the mutterings of the dying Israelite had led him to believe contained written directions as to where the treasure was buried. How later he had induced the tribe he lived with to make war on the Coorong natives for the purpose of obtaining the box, but with such ill success that he deemed it wise for his own safety to escape to the Fishery at Encounter Bay. At first he hoped that, by offering part of the valuables to the whalers, they would assist him, but he soon saw that, even if he cared to trust them, they would not involve themselves with the Government by attacking the blacks, and he knew he could not obtain the precious locket in any other way, for Talco constantly wore it on his breast as an ornament.

He dared not accompany Major Cuthbert’s party, because

he feared the police would discover that he was an absconder from Van Diemen's Land. The next chance that offered was to join one of the squatting expeditions going to the Tatiara to take up country ; and it was with this object that he attached himself to Grantley and volunteered to show him a good run. Once there, he knew they must come into collision with the fierce tribes of blacks ; and, to tell the truth, he was determined it should be so, to give him an opportunity of shooting Talco and thus gaining possession of the brass locket. Almost as soon as they reached the future station, he heard that this famous aboriginal was in the vicinity, still proudly wearing his trophy, but on no occasion could he see him. If he had done so, he meant to shoot him down without the slightest compunction.

Then came the various conflicts with the whole tribe, and on the mere chance of one having the box on him or being the great Talco himself, he had turned over and examined each dead warrior, but without success.

It was a hard struggle for him to fly and leave his hopes of wealth behind, but it was better than facing a trial, with the strong probability of being hanged ; for, as an escaped convict, he felt there was little hope for him unless he turned Queen's evidence, which, for Roland's sake, he would not do.

'Now,' said he, 'I want you to assist me in finding the fortune buried near the head of the Coorong. The first thing is to obtain the locket containing the clue ; that done, I believe the rest would be easy.'

'I will help you,' replied Roland, 'but I see many difficulties which may prove insurmountable. These are largely increased by your having remained away so long. For instance, Talco is probably dead.'

'I have thought of that,' answered the *soi-disant* Jonathan, 'and, if so, we must discover where he is buried. You know that in the case of so noted a warrior all his cherished possessions are certain to be buried with him.'

'Then much trouble must be expected in inducing any of the survivors of the tribe, probably now very few, after ten



years of our civilising tactics, to show where he lies,' observed the squatter.

'I anticipated that ; but it can be done by the aid of judicious management and other methods we need not particularise now,' replied Quig. 'I still remember some of their language, and that will help us.'

'There is the more serious fear that the box has been opened or worn out,' said Roland reflectively.

'It may be so ; but the Jew plainly muttered that the spring was strong, very strong. At any rate, we must hope for the best. Now, you know the facts, and, as you are cleverer than I am, I leave it to you to think out some plan by which we can spend the necessary time on the Coorong without exciting suspicion.'

'That won't be difficult,' replied Grantley, 'always supposing you have not learned to drink since we parted. If so, not one yard do I go.'

'Be easy on that score ; I am not one bit more a drunkard than I was ten years ago, and, while on this business, not a drop shall pass my lips that you don't approve.'

'That is settled, then. Before the shearing is over, I will devise some scheme upon which to act.'

On subsequent occasions, when the old companions were out by themselves (for at the station Grantley carefully took no more notice of Jonathan Quig than of the other hands), the wanderer related the substance of his other adventures since they had parted.

## CHAPTER XIX

### DARKIE TELLS HIS STORY

HE had sailed with old Kark for the whaler, almost directly after he had returned from seeing Petrel away from the island. The captain gladly welcomed him, as soon as he heard he was a capable hand, merely remarking—

‘It’s not my business to ask inconvenient questions ; and so long as you act straight with me and do your duty you are an honest man and an American citizen.’

Two days later they cleared the land, and, falling in with whales, were so successful that the vessel was quickly filled up. The recruit, on whom the name of Jonah was bestowed, not only quite satisfied the master, but became a vast favourite with the crew. These amicable relations continued during the voyage to Boston, and on their arrival there, being offered increased wages by the captain, he accompanied him to Baffin’s Bay a few weeks later, as he felt that the life exactly suited his roving disposition.

They experienced many vicissitudes in the Arctic regions, and did not return for two years, though ultimately the venture proved profitable to the owners, master, and crew. Jonah, however, had grown tired of the sea, principally, perhaps, because the excessive cold affected him. Moreover, he began to think it wiser to sever his connection with all those who knew whence he had come, and thus cover his trail preparatory to returning for the concealed treasure. He had solemnly promised Petrel never to go back until there could be no question of the safety of Roland Grantley, and that pledge he never contemplated breaking. Bearing this in mind, it was essential that he should leave no trace by which he could be followed. Consequently, he next made his way far up into the backwoods, and for a while engaged in hunting, sometimes with the lawless whites, and later with the Indians. He even became a warrior, and was sufficiently initiated into their customs to be adopted as a member of the tribe. One object of this was that he might be tattooed, and so obliterate certain marks by which the English and Australian police could identify him, or indeed any one who read his description in the printed notice offering a reward for his apprehension. So effective was the process that it was now impossible to recognise him by the old signs alone. After leaving these people he entered the service of the Hudson Bay Company, and, as he was an expert hunter and trapper, he became a

BOURKE  
RIVER DARLING



PHOTO: KERRY & CO.



valued servant. Again the cold and exposure rendered the life distasteful, and he migrated to Mexico, and thence to South America, spending much of the time there on various ranches ; but he also appeared to have been at one time or another 'soldier, sailor, tinker, tailor'—in fact, a peripatetic Jack-of-all-trades. He thus combined business and pleasure by at once promoting his object in concealing his identity and gratifying his Bohemian instincts in this roving life. Further to cut the painter of the past, he frequently changed his name.

At last a great longing to revisit his old haunts and search for the buried treasure came upon him, and, making his way to the coast, he set sail at Buenos Ayres for London. There he stayed but a few days, quite remote from the scenes of his exploits as a youngster, and finally took a passage to Brisbane.

On arrival there, he immediately went up-country, and here he had one bitter experience that he could never forget, in which, though he escaped with his life, his companion perished.

It was blazing hot weather, and they had some two hundred miles of an almost waterless waste to cross. Through this a telegraph line had been lately laid, as nearly in a straight line as possible. The road was much longer round by the supposed permanent waters, which had, in the protracted drought then raging, with two exceptions, quite failed, and these two were said to be close to the telegraph line.

'My companion, poor Dick Hard, had worked at putting up the wire, and told me he knew every inch of the way and the exact situation of the waters. We camped at the verge of the dry stage for a couple of days, and, as our horses were good and strong, we anticipated no difficulty in pushing through. The longest distance without a drink was only seventy miles, and what was that to a first-class horse? So confident were we, that we started in the morning instead of in the evening, and the day turned out a snorter. We didn't trouble about carrying any water either—just took a big drink and rode gaily on, making sure, like a pair of fools, that, though we

might have a bit of parching, it wouldn't do us any harm, as before night we would reach the Beefwood Tree. However, when it was about midday, we began to think a little more caution might have been advisable. The heat was something to shrink under, as mile after mile we plodded along that interminable row of tall poles. I tried to count them, twenty to a mile, till my head grew dizzy, and for the life of me I could not be sure whether I had counted the last post or not when I came to it. Then I tried shutting my eyes; but it would not do—those d——d high sticks would be taken notice of, and I was obliged, in spite of myself, to begin calculating how many we had to pass, at a score to the mile, before we arrived at the far side of the desert. We stopped for a little while during the hottest part of the day in the miserable shade of some dwarf bushes, but that didn't do us much good. Dick said we could not be more than twenty-five miles from the well, and he did not think we were as far. Well, we started again, and it seemed hotter than ever, and my mate began to feel thirst badly; you see, he was a man who had drunk hard, and none of them can stand going long without some kind of liquid. Then he got impatient, and pushed his horse unmercifully. I don't mean galloped him—that came later—but he made him go beyond a walk, often at a canter. I did not feel the want of a drink much then, and tried to keep him cool; but he lost his temper, and said he knew more about dry country than a b—— fool of a Yankee, which rather riled me. Anyhow, we didn't quite quarrel, for we kept pretty close together until nearly sundown. Suddenly he said we had passed the Beefwood Well; he knew it by the small round hill in front of us. I did not think so, because most of the track was bad and rough with fallen timber, or rather sticks, preventing us making good headway. Another reason why I felt confident I was right, and that we had travelled slowly, was because I had now and then counted the telegraph poles. He wanted to turn back, and I wouldn't; I said we had passed no big beefwood tree, such as he told me the well was called after. To this he replied that it must have

blown down, or we had missed it somehow, and that I couldn't be expected to see it when I had been asleep half the way. All along he had said this well was not a hundred yards from the line ; but now he thought it might be more, perhaps a quarter of a mile.

' This frightened me, and I begged him to keep on, and, if we did not see it, to make for the other one, the Soakage, which was right on the line with an old hut by it, and so impossible to miss. But it was no use ; he said he wasn't such a durned fool as to travel all that distance without a drink, if I was ; I had better go on—he had wasted enough time arguing with me. With that he turned his horse's head and rode back. I'd half a mind to follow him, but he riled me above a bit by the way he had talked to me. Then I began to doubt if he knew where the well was ; and, even granting this, if the tree had been destroyed, he might not be able to find it. Then I called to mind what numbers of men had lost their lives by riding their horses about hunting for water, when, if they had kept straight on, all would have ended well. So I just determined to continue right on along the wire, keeping a sharp look-out for the big beefwood tree. Dick, by this time, was nearly out of sight ; but I thought he would soon come after me if he did not find the well.

' Anyhow, away I went, though my poor horse was very tired ; still, as it was getting cooler, he stepped out at a fair pace. Up to dark I kept a sharp look-out for that big tree, but devil a one could I see, beefwood or any other wood. It seemed now to be the right thing to camp awhile, in hopes that Dick would have the sense to follow me. Quite an hour passed without any sign of him, and then, as the horse was fidgety and appeared likely to break away, I made another start. I had now much ado to prevent myself going back to my mate, for it seemed as if he must have found water, seeing that he had not overtaken me. Luckily for me, I had sense enough to stick to my resolution and go on. My game old nag, too, never hesitated ; he went off the moment I mounted him, straight along the line. All night we kept

going, often very slowly; but towards daylight it got quite chilly, when the horse plucked up a bit.

‘When it was daylight again, there ahead of me stretched the row of poles as if there were no end to them. Across small stony ridges and little plains with diminutive trees and stunted bushes, but nothing to give shade enough to shelter a kangaroo. Dry, everywhere dry, except for the tantalising mirage, which, as the sun mounted higher, displayed lakes and pools to the right and left. I have often wondered if horses see that damnable illusion. If so, they show more sense than their riders, for they pay no regard to it. Old Cast-iron, as I named my nag, passed on without a glance at the bright, clear waters, on which the rays of the sun seemed to play so vividly that I could scarcely resist the impulse to turn him from the track and rush madly into them.

‘A fiercer heat, if possible, than that of the previous day set in, and slower and yet slower crawled on the wearied brute. I was now suffering torments from thirst, but to spare him I walked sometimes. There was hope, too, in front, for far away in the distance rose a high hill—so at least it appeared from the dead-level country—and under that was the Soakage, if any faith could be placed in the description given of its whereabouts, not only by Dick but by others as well. There ought to be a trig on top; and, oh! how long and eagerly I looked for that pile of stones! Mile after mile passed, and still I could see nothing but a smoky mist enshrouding its crest. Then, in despair, I would vow not to look again till ten telegraph poles were passed; but mortal endurance would not bear the strain, and not three were left behind before my gaze sought the hill-top once more. Yes! no! yes! I could have shouted for joy! only that my swollen tongue and parched throat refused to utter a sound. There rose the pile with the staff in the centre. I remember little more until I stood by a shallow well in the side of a rocky creek. Cast-iron was there, too, occasionally sucking up the clear, cool water. I knew that I had drunk, for my head was wet from being dipped in the well; but my thirst appeared



just as consuming as ever, and I drank and drank again. No doubt a heavy sleep followed, for when I awoke night had evidently long set in. The horse was near, feeding quietly on the dry grass in the bed of the channel. I simply took off his saddle and bridle, got a bit of damper out of the swag, ate it, and went off to sleep again. Maybe it will be said, Why didn't you go back and help your mate? What! me face that awful road again, when I had only just escaped by the skin of my teeth! I'm not such a born idiot as that, and it's no use expecting to find a hero in a man of my stamp. Besides, how did I know that the d——d fool had not found the well and was laughing at me?

'No, I waited for him to come up; and, when evening of the next day fell, a couple of line-repairers from the telegraph station thirty miles further on came by, and told me the wire was interrupted back the way I had come. Then I told them of Dick, and where I had parted from him.

"Why, the Beefwood was blown down months ago!" said one; "and the well is in a hollow, where it can't be seen from the line!"

'Then I began to think it was a bad look-out for my poor pal, especially as I heard one say to the other that it was very likely another case of breaking the wire.

'Anyhow, they offered to find me a horse if I would go with them, leaving Cast-iron at the Soakage; and, as a spell was the best thing for him, I consented. They had got plenty of good things to eat, and a camel to carry them and the water; so away we went at a good pace till about midnight, when we camped. At daylight we started again, and in the afternoon reached the Beefwood Tree Well, not half a mile on from where obstinate Dick turned back; but, as the tree had fallen, there was nothing in particular to mark the place for a stranger. Of course, I ought to have known that there was something out of the ordinary look of things about the confounded spot; and I can't make it out now how I never noticed that old tracks turned off from the telegraph line, and that there was scarcely any path alongside it for a bit. But it was that

stupid fool Dick's fault ; why didn't he come on with me ? Then he 'd have seen what it all meant, as he 'd been there before.

' Well, we gave our horses a drink and pushed on, and we hadn't gone above five miles before we saw what was the matter. There ahead on one side of the line lay the carcass of a horse ; it was easy to see he was dead by the stiff, extended legs. A telegraph pole, too, lay flat, and near it something that he who has once seen it does not forget in a hurry—a naked dead body, already swollen to three times its natural size, and baking, blistering, and festering under the fierce heat of that terrific sun.

" " I thought so," said the boss repairer ; " the poor devil has burned down a pole and cut the wire to bring assistance, but he must have felt pretty sure it would come too late to save him."

' This is what had happened, for we followed up his tracks to see. After leaving me, he hunted about out from the line for the well till dark, then camped till daylight and began again. He rode back by the side of the telegraph for many miles, and then had lost his head and galloped in all directions until his horse knocked up. By this time he was nearly where he started from, and here he bled the poor nag to drink his blood—the pannikin showed that. Then he tried climbing a telegraph pole to get at the wire—we could tell that by the marks on the one next that burnt down ; but he had not been able to break or detach the wire, probably could not even reach it. Failing in this, he made a fire round another pole, a thinner one ; but it must have taken hours to get it down, each minute increasing his weakness and adding to his tortures. Only think of the sufferings of that thirst-stricken, tormented wretch, watching impatiently the slow action of the fire. Why, his agony in approaching the heat to pile on more fuel must have been awful ; and it was all unavailing, too !

' At last the pole fell, or rather leaned over, and he had still strength left to drag its butt out from the line to allow

the top to fall lower. It was still almost beyond his reach, but, with infinite labour to one suffering so much, he with two stones bruised and battered the tough wire apart. Did he then know how long it would be before help could reach him? Who shall say? Under a miserable bush he had obviously lain long, and then thrown off most of his clothes—the strange course that poor wretches perishing in this way so frequently and unaccountably adopt in their frenzy.

‘Again he had wandered about, with short and faltering steps, sometimes actually crawling on his hands and knees, now beneath one shrub to seek its shade and then beneath another, but never far from the burnt post and broken wire, as if conscious that his sole hope now of rescue lay there. At last came the final awful, helpless agony that seizes the miserable dying creature, whether brute or human being, that yields up life alone on the drought-stricken, insect-covered plains of the Australian interior.

“O God of all created things, is it possible to reconcile the divine attributes of mercy, justice, and omnipotence Thy worshippers ascribe to Thee, with the unspeakable tortures that some of Thy creatures endure before they die?”

‘I did not say those words exactly, but I felt like it, as I saw how he had struggled and torn and kicked up the hard ground under the torment of those horrid ants and things in his eyes, nostrils, and mouth. Poor Dick! he paid a dreadful penalty for his obstinacy; he’d be alive now, if he could only have believed that another man might know as much as he did.

‘While the line-repairers did their work I managed to scoop out a shallow grave—and very shallow it was, for the soil had dried so precious hard that it would have taken a day to get it down any depth. Then it felt that blasted hot, a man could not put on a spurt for even the shortest time. The wire, too, was soon spliced, and we did not stay to get a new pole, but stuck up the old one again. Why, there wasn’t a tree within twenty-four hours’ journey high enough to replace that stick, so what’s the use of saying we ought to have done the thing properly?

‘Was it likely, then, that we were going to stop merely to plant a dead body a few feet deeper? Besides, we didn’t think it a nice thing staying after dark with that lying there, and the man who says he wouldn’t mind is a gasser! So we finished at dusk and made tracks back to the well, camped there a few hours, and were off once more. You see, the horses were fat as whales, and knew they were heading for home.

‘The next day we arrived at the Soakage, where I found old Cast-iron all right and fit to go on. At the telegraph station they gave me a job that lasted a goodish bit, and, but for the great object that brought me back to the country, I should have stayed longer. That is, so long as they didn’t want me to go back to the burnt telegraph pole, where the dead man lies with a few inches of gravel over him. Of course, they would go when the line became interrupted again, for they are fine fellows, who do their duty at all hazards and in all weathers; but you bet they won’t go there by night—not the men, anyhow, who, like me, saw that face with its look of hopeless agony and horror. Do I suppose he walks? Yes, I’m sure of it, and if I went by there after dark I’d see him safe enough.’

## CHAPTER XX

### THE PRIZE IS WON AT LAST

WHEN the shearing season began in Queensland, Jonathan Quig left the telegraph station determined to work his way to the Darling, and then down that river and the Murray gradually into the Tatiara. This he did, passing from shed to shed; and it was while shearing on a station near Bourke that he heard that a Mr. Grantley, evidently the man he most desired to meet, was the owner of Moolahalla. He, however, sought employment, as the nomadic clipper of fleeces does, from the various squatters on the track he had chosen, and

threw no chance away of making a few pounds, until he presented himself before his old companion.

‘As might have been expected, you knew me,’ he said as he concluded; ‘but I don’t think any other man in Australia would.’

‘Not one, I believe,’ added Roland; ‘I only did by your voice, and somehow even that has not appeared familiar to me since. You have acquired the Yankee twang, which is a disguise in itself.’

There was indeed little reason to fear that the most suspicious would recognise the returned wanderer. His face had aged and furrowed, two or three front teeth were gone, and the formerly bare chin was covered with a thick greyish beard, while the whole carriage of the man had altered, the tall, upright form having now a decided stoop. He also wore his hair long, as did many of the class he affected to belong to.

Though Grantley thought it extremely improbable that anything would be suspected, much less discovered, he could not but exhibit some anxiety as to the ultimate result of their quest in the district where both of them were once so well known.

He intended, however, that Jonathan should never go further than the Elbow, or Goolwa, as the future city on that historic spot was now named, and only there for a very short time.

Though fully determined to neglect no measures to ensure safety, it often struck him that any special precautions were superfluous, so greatly had the rover changed, particularly when talking with others. Then he seemed to entirely lose his old manner and adopt the bush form of speech and slang, as he did when absorbed in the recital of his tragic experience on the telegraph line. When with the class of men he had lived and associated with for so many years, he became one of them, and none could detect the cultured and even courtly manner that once was natural to him. He was conscious of the change himself, and once said to Grantley—

‘It’s safest to drop manners which are too fine for one’s station in life, and I’ve made no effort to keep mine. Perhaps, if I come into my expectations, with fashionable tailor-made clothes on, I may again pay proper attention to my language and pronunciation.’

The shearing progressed well, and in another fortnight there was every prospect of the finishing day arriving. No long, exasperating delays had occurred, and all hands were in high spirits as the receipt of big cheques became a near certainty.

At this stage the mail arrived late one night, when the squatter was sitting alone posting up his books. Among other letters was one from Miss Grantley; he could not mistake the bold, free hand. Putting it on one side, he completed the task of going through and disposing of the others in due order. Then he broke the seal and read as follows—

‘MY DEAREST NEPHEW,—At last my proudest anticipations are realised, and I can greet you as Sir Roland Grantley of Grantley Hall, the successive deaths of Sir Archibald and of your cousins having left you the sole male representative of our ancient family.

‘You may think this unfeeling to the dead, but for years my brother was a great sufferer, and death must have come to him as a relief. In the best interests of our race, moreover, it is well that such disreputable members of it as your cousins—the twins—should have given place to you, and thus allowed title and estates to go together. Then, again, I never professed any peculiar affection for my brother; indeed, he neither desired nor deserved it.

‘As I long since told you, I knew that he had made his will in your favour, but the details he did not divulge to me. The last mail, however, not only brought the intelligence of his death, but a copy of his will, in which he declares you heir to the whole of the Grantley estates—which are simply charged with a life-interest of £3000 a year for his daughter. She is further provided for by a settlement of £20,000 invested in consols, and a small detached landed property. He expresses his earnest desire that you will marry her and live in the old mansion. She is now only twenty-six, and one of the most beautiful girls in England. She has proved herself a most devoted daughter by rejecting many advantageous offers for her hand and attending on

her father all these years with an affection that stamps her as a woman possessed of the highest qualities.

‘No doubt the lawyers will advise you in full of all details of the will, and of the steps necessary for you to take. We all expect to see you shortly, and meanwhile heartily congratulate you on your good fortune.—Your affectionate aunt,  
ARABELLA GRANTLEY.

‘P.S.—I hear that Sir Archibald was never the same man after the death of his son. It was indeed a dreadful blow to so ambitious a man.

‘I am making all arrangements to leave for England soon after I have seen you. Poor dear Elinor has written me to come and live with her, and this is a duty I owe both to my brother’s memory and to her.  
A. G.’

Among the numerous circulars and newspapers which find their way to large stations was a formidable envelope, which had escaped his notice. It proved to be advices from his lawyers in Adelaide, communicating the fact of his good fortune, together with details of the will, and asking for his instructions in writing, unless he intended to visit the capital soon, which they thought would be best in his own interests.

There could be no doubt that the inheritance, for which he had abandoned his love and sacrificed his happiness, was his at last absolutely without conditions. Certainly there was the desire expressed in the latest codicil, dated only the day before the testator’s death, that he should marry his cousin ; but legally he was free to take to wife whom he pleased. Would the dying man have been so generous if he had known that the match he had evidently set his heart upon was impossible ? That no one could tell, but Roland doubted it in his present mood, when his thoughts were dwelling more on what the great prize had cost him than on its actual worth.

‘But for it Petrel would have been mine,’ he repeated again and again, and the words appeared to be echoed by all the mysterious sounds of the night.

Unable to endure his own reflections in inactivity, he went out and paced about for hours, as he often did. Worn out at last, he returned to his room, and, opening a small drawer,

took from a receptacle within a portrait. It was the one Petrel had given him.

‘By Heaven!’ he muttered, ‘if she is only half as beautiful now, I will install her yet in Grantley Hall. What care I for the prejudiced schemes and wishes of the dead man?’

‘If she will only consent, we will bury the past and live for each other still. The scheming woman who intrigued to plant me there at the price of love, honour, and happiness may yet find her success coupled with a condition that will blast her triumph—the presence of the woman she has so wronged as mistress of the Hall. Nor, my good aunt, will your selfish plots succeed as you expect, for I am well aware that you have studied your own interests as much as mine. You believed that by placing me under so vast an obligation, through inducing Sir Archibald to make me his heir, I must receive you as an honoured member of my household; and doubtless it would be so if I married your niece. Do I not know you well enough to be assured that, given the opportunity, you will so work upon the ties of relationship with her as to secure your object and establish your footing? I should be a fool to question it; you are too clever to fail. But, my dear aunt, how if Petrel occupies the post of chatelaine of our ancestral halls? Then I shall have defeated your machinations and half-avenged all that you have caused me to suffer by your damnable wiles. It would be indeed a triumph; but will Petrel consent?’

From these cogitations it will be gathered that Roland Grantley had some designs yet, by which he hoped to check-mate the relative who had taken so deep an interest in his progress through life, and who, it must be admitted, had done much to advance his material welfare, as well as to frustrate his love. Having arrived at this charitable state of mind, he sank into a troubled sleep, from which the morning light roused him in no very fit condition, to all appearance, for the heavy duties of the day. But Grantley was one of those men who always rise to every emergency, and as the hours wore on he became more fit for work.



None the less, he said to himself when, work over, he wended his way homeward—

‘One more day gone. Another fortnight at this rate, and I can start down to put the last chance to the test.’

\* \* \* \* \*

It is all over at length. The last man has been paid his cheque, and more than half of them have already saddled their horses and departed in search of other sheds. Many, with the best intentions to avoid public-houses and save their hard-earned money, will succumb to the first temptation. Others will pass on, until some seductive being in petticoats besets their path, and then, in a delirious pursuit of what is to them probably the unattainable, their funds will quickly melt. A few simply mean to seek the nearest grog-shop and have a ‘glorious spree.’ They know themselves too well to dream of postponing, much less permanently resisting, their inordinate craving for ardent spirits. It is a short ecstasy, but to its votaries life has none other so irresistible.

Meanwhile, Grantley is talking to Jonathan Quig by the sheepyard fence.

‘You start to-morrow,’ he said, ‘and ride down as far as Wentworth. Sell your horse there and go on by steamer. It will be quicker and excite no suspicion, as riding all the way might. When near Wellington, land and buy a boat, or maybe you can obtain one at a river-port going down. You must say you intend to start fishing and shooting. Then make your way to Goolwa, say in four weeks from to-day, and a letter shall be at the post-office for you from me. It will instruct you to see my agent there, who will be on the lookout for a suitable boatman to accompany me on a shooting excursion up the lakes. When he has made the necessary arrangements, we will go on this wild-goose chase of yours; and, if success is to be attained, we will attain it.’

‘I don’t doubt it, or you either, in the least,’ replied Quig. ‘I have only to join you as directed, which is easy enough; and I see you mean business by the short time you have allowed before we meet again to begin the search.’

## CHAPTER XXI

## THE MYSTERIOUS LOCKET

‘ YES, nephew, I am anxious to leave for England ; but there is much to be done first, and it is not likely that I shall get off for a month or six weeks, so that, if you are bent on this shooting excursion, there will be ample time. It’s very extraordinary how fond you men are of spending your lives outside comfortable houses in your own sweet society. One would think that after all these years in the wilds of Australia you would be glad to repose among your own people.’

‘ I have had nearly a fortnight in the gay city of Adelaide, aunt, and must seek a little real relaxation away from business. Besides, you will make better progress with your preparations for departure without me.’

Aunt Arabella was in a decidedly bad humour. She had made sure that Roland would return clothed and in his right mind. Delighted at coming into a title, a splendid income, and a magnificent unencumbered estate, he would be full of gratitude to herself as the founder of his brilliant fortunes. Instead of this, he was coldly reticent, making no pretence of being guided by, or even of consulting, her wishes. When asked if he purposed accompanying her to England, he had replied, ‘ No ; he had not yet decided as to his future movements,’ and all her further inquiries elicited nothing more satisfactory.

‘ What did he intend doing with the Hall, pending his arrival ? Should it be renovated to be ready for his reception ? ’ she asked.

‘ At present nothing could be done ; he meant to leave it in the charge of a caretaker, the late baronet’s housekeeper,’ he answered.

After this eminently unsuccessful attempt to extract information, the old lady desisted, until a more convenient season, from all endeavours to discover his plans ; but she lost no opportunity of extolling the virtues and accomplish-

ments of the young lady who was waiting to be wooed on the other side of the ocean.

'You can go first, aunt,' he said with a smile, 'and report if a poor devil of a rough bushman has a chance with such a pearl beyond price. I really don't feel that with my feeble merits I ought to aspire to the paragon you represent my fair cousin to be.'

Miss Grantley was not to be put off by this miserable affectation of humility.

'Sir Roland Grantley may *aspire*,' she said, with a strong emphasis on the word, 'to any lady in England.'

'I am sure he looks handsome enough,' cried another voice, as Mrs. Enfield clasped him in her sisterly embrace, while her lord could be heard outside bringing on the young olive branches.

The fair Maria had grown matronly, as the proud mother of five had a right to do, but otherwise there was little change in her; a few lines could be found by looking for them, but they did not detract from the charm of the comely, pleasant face. Enfield had aged, but it was obvious that time with him also had not dealt unkindly. Floss Gifford was away at the Tatiara station, but expected back in a week or two, so that there would be a general gathering of old friends. Presently the two men paired off together, and then Roland heard that nothing had ever been discovered to throw any light on the fate of Joan. Sergeant Wash had been transferred years ago to another district, but left still believing that Floss was the murderer, and that, if he were allowed to have his way, the mystery would be quickly solved.

'Obviously a man of one idea,' observed Grantley.

Then he led the conversation in other directions, and learned that Petrel was well, and still living with her husband. Auntie had died eighteen months since, somewhat suddenly, to the great grief of her niece. Since then Turnstile had given way more than ever to drink, and was, apparently, becoming a confirmed toper.

There were great changes in the district. The Bluff was

now 'Rosetta Head'; the Point, 'Victor Harbour'; the Nob, 'Port Elliott'; the Elbow, 'Goolwa'; and many more old names had been wiped out and others substituted. The whale-fishery was given up, the animals having almost entirely disappeared. Farming had taken the place of grazing, and this had necessitated the demolition of the indigenous trees to an immense extent, and the wanton destruction of many more had still further altered the aspect of the country. Thus opened up to the cold and biting southerly and westerly gales, the district was rapidly becoming denuded of its magnificent forest timber and shorn of half its beauty.

'Still, I've made my home here, and do not think of moving,' said Enfield. 'Maria, too, clings to the hope that we shall yet know what has become of poor Joan, and so does Floss. He and she are the only people who talk about it now, and, whenever he comes up from the Tatiara, they discuss it over and over again. He declares that nothing shall induce him to leave the country until the truth is known.'

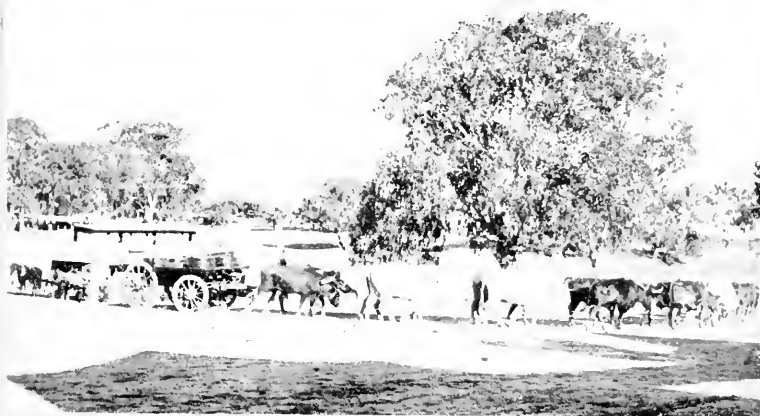
'Poor fellow,' mused Roland, 'I am not sure that his burden is not the hardest to bear.'

Three days later, Grantley met Jonathan Quig at Goolwa, and started for the Coorong. Their boat was sufficiently large to carry a small tent and enough provisions to keep them for a fortnight, in addition to their fire-arms and various other means of propitiating the blacks. Among the rest was a supply of that potent agent of the white man in his intercourse with all uncivilised people, ardent spirits.

Jonathan had met very few blacks since arriving on the lakes, and was careful not to make many inquiries; but there had been heavy mortality in the Coorong tribes, as indeed in all others brought into contact with the Europeans. The remnant of the tribe to which Talco more particularly belonged were supposed to be located near the head of the lake on the ocean side. They therefore resolved to continue on without stopping to land on either shore, unless they came across signs of the people they sought. It was not unlikely they would see their encampments, or their own fire or boat might attract



GOOLYA. RIVER MURRAY.



WENTWORTH. DARLING JUNCTION.



the notice of the blacks. In the latter respect they were fortunate, for on the second evening, when they drew to the land to camp, they were met by an old man and his lubra, and found they had their wurley close by.

Just sufficient was given them to whet their appetites for more, and, when the travellers had pitched their tent, the aged couple were evidently delighted to have neighbours possessed of so much that their souls coveted. On some pretext Grantley took the man aside, and began questioning him about the tribe. He named several of the men he had known before mentioning Talco. At that name, however, there was a quick change in the face of his sable listener, and then he burst into a wail for the dead, and Roland knew that, if the precious relic was to be recovered, it must be sought in the grave of the chief. He tried to elicit more information, but was compelled to desist for the time, as the old fellow showed all the repugnance of the Australian native to speak of the departed. Later he made himself known to the woman, to her intense delight. He had seen her on several occasions when travelling to and from the Tatiara, and she remembered him at once on hearing his name. After some desultory remarks, he asked her about different members of the tribe, and she, first looking to see that her lord was too far off to hear, frankly answered his questions, even acknowledging that Talco wore the brass box and became the chief man of his people. He had not been long dead ; the last cold killed him, just before the warm weather set in, and he died with the token of his power hanging above his heart, for he would not allow it to be taken from him for a moment.

‘What became of it? Did another black fellow obtain it?’ asked Roland.

‘No,’ she said sadly, ‘black men not like that ; bury all about things belonging to that one, catchem when him jump up.’

But, when asked where the grave was, she only pointed towards the head of the lake. In vain were further questions, and at length, not wishing to appear too anxious, Roland

ceased to urge her. Then the old pair were regaled with luxuries such as their uncultivated appetites had probably never before tasted. The following morning attempts were again made to extract more precise information respecting the situation of the defunct warrior's grave, but the old couple were adamant. Grantley, in an endeavour to make the man communicative, spoke in an unreserved manner of his own shipwreck and landing on the coast, and the death of the other whites, finally inquiring where they were buried, as if his mission was to seek for their remains. But it was utterly without effect; the ancient savage was too deeply impregnated with the superstition of his race to give the slightest hint to the white destroyer where lay the sacred resting-place of his dead chief.

Feeling that nothing more was to be obtained from the reticent pair, the searchers made sail for the opposite side of the water, shooting as they went, and at this encampment they fell in with a party of about a dozen natives. Rendered more cautious by their late failure, they only made general inquiries, but soon discovered that one of their number, who called himself Snowball—an evil-looking, one-eyed scoundrel, who boasted that he had been a long time with the whalers and was 'all same white fellow'—was the man for them. He no sooner found that they had spirits than he volunteered to accompany them anywhere, saying he would show them the best places to get good shooting and fishing.

Grantley now became exceedingly apprehensive that the keen-sighted aborigines would recognise Jonathan, and insisted upon his keeping in the background. To ensure greater freedom from risk, they started at once with their new ally for the extreme end of the lake. After excellent sport during the day, Snowball, nothing loth, was at night primed to talk freely by repeated draughts of raw whisky. Without the least reserve he expatiated on his many murderous deeds, in which, if he were to be believed, both whites and blacks had suffered.

'Yes, excepting himself, Talco was the best fighter of the tribe; but he had a great medicine-box, which no man could



open and which he never let any one touch, and it gave him great courage and strength. When he died, those who buried him knew, by the sound, that it was hollow, but it would not let them see inside.'

'Where did the tribe lay their dead chiefs, such as Talco?'

'Among the bushes at the foot of the high sandhill they saw to-day with the smoke on it, near their landing-place. Talco was the last buried there, and they sometimes still went to the grave to do honour to the great warrior—as they will to me when I *crack-a-back*.'

'Doubtless they will, for Snowball is a man,' assented the listener, 'and they will put white stones round and shells over it, as is fitting for the grave of a chief.'

'Yes, like they have about the grave of Talco,' said the boaster. 'Show the place? No, I am not b—— fool enough to show a black man's grave to any —— white fellow.'

To repeat this again and again, until sleep overtook him, was all that Snowball could or would do. Long he slept, and awoke at last apparently oblivious of the entire conversation, but sullen and evidently suffering from the effects of the spirits. He now wished to rejoin his countrymen, and, as this exactly accorded with the views of Grantley and Jonathan, a start was soon made. On their way back they stopped for lunch at the spot Snowball had indicated as the burial-ground of the chiefs, and strolled up the sandhill, taking him with them, determined, if they felt any doubt as to which was Talco's grave, to elicit the information from him somehow. Apparently by accident, they noticed the graves, and at a glance were convinced that the body of the man they had come so far to seek was laid there. It was scarcely possible there could be any mistake; but Grantley motioned Quig away, and in the language of the tribe quoted a few words of their lament, coupled with the name of the chief. This broke down the reserve of the savage, and in a burst of grief he poured forth the death-song of the hero whom in life he had hated and envied. Then they silently left the spot.

That night they joined the blacks again, and did their best

to create a favourable impression, praising Snowball as a splendid duck-hunter and guide, and giving them nearly all the game they had shot as well as other things. They were now desirous of shaking off their new friends without exciting suspicion, so that they might return to carry out their design of rifling the dead man's tomb. This difficulty was solved for them by the natives expressing a desire to be conveyed in the boat across the lake to the opposite side. Early the following morning their wish was complied with ; and then the two adventurers felt their opportunity had come at last, and under cover of night they sailed back to the edge of the water near the burying-ground, drew the boat on shore, and half-an-hour later, lantern in hand, stood by the side of the grave.

'It's not a pleasant task as a whole,' remarked Grantley, as he lighted the lamp ; 'first to make that poor devil drunk on purpose to pump and deceive him, and then to rob the defunct chief of the thing he prized more than anything else.'

'If it is indeed here, this will be the most agreeable job I have ever undertaken in my life,' answered the other, 'except the one to come, I hope, of digging up the treasure. I wonder which is the head ; I don't suppose these people have any prejudice in favour of the east or any other point of the compass.'

Carefully putting everything that marked the grave on one side, in the order in which they were to be rearranged, Jonathan proceeded to remove the soil. It was but shallow, not more than two feet deep, and presently the opossum-skin rug and other wrappings round the body were disclosed. The odour was sickening, but he worked on, Roland standing a little way off on guard. Presently the former said—

'We must make a smoke ; I can't stand this—it's too awful.'

'No,' replied Grantley peremptorily ; 'it would probably blaze up and attract the attention of the blacks ; this dim lantern is dangerous enough.'

'But we shall have finished and gone before they can come.'

‘Ay ; but if we find what you are seeking for now, we may have to search for your fortune, which will require time. Besides, I am not sure they don’t suspect who you are already, and in revenge may begin talking or even give you up. No, those who rifle graves, for whatever purpose, must accept the unpleasant consequences of such ghastly work.’

‘I can’t lift out the body ; it’s too horrible to touch,’ expostulated Jonathan, now almost unnerved. ‘I wish we had never come.’

‘Rip open the coverings, then,’ said Grantley angrily, ‘and be quick about it ; that will do just as well.’

When this was done, the decomposing face of Talco glared ferociously up at them. Though decay had proceeded far, there was no mistaking the fierce countenance, with the deep scar stretching obliquely across it. The broad breast was laid bare, but no brass ornament lay there, and a look of the profoundest dejection and disappointment chased the expression of horror and disgust from the face of the searcher as he unfolded more of the corrupting form. Grantley here again interfered—

‘It will most likely be with the weapons ; they always put them by the side of the corpse. Part of a spear is showing there.’

‘Thank heaven for the hint ! You think of everything, Grantley,’ exclaimed Jonathan, recovering himself, and again in eager quest.

A number of native weapons were now disinterred, and with them a kangaroo-rat-skin pouch, wound round with some fur cord. It was torn open, and there lay the object of all their trouble and research—an oval brass box, about four or five inches in circumference, artistically formed to represent a turtle clinging to a chain. Pouncing eagerly on it, Jonathan Quig strove to open it ; but if a spring ever existed, it was not to be found now.

‘Is that the locket ?’ asked Roland with apparent calmness.

‘I’d swear to it anywhere,’ was the reply.

‘ And so would I,’ answered Grantley ; ‘ that is the strange article the Jew had on board the *Mary* that so excited and puzzled my boyish curiosity.’

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE JEW’S HOARD

WITHOUT another word the dead warrior was replaced in his grave, with all his panoply by his side, ready for the day when he should spring to life again in the black man’s abode of bliss, where no white devil shall ever enter in to share or disturb his sensual delights. The earth was filled in, and the stones and shells placed with all care round and over it, so that even the keen eye of the Australian savage might fail to discover the sacrilege that had been perpetrated.

Then the two riflers of the tomb returned to their boat and sought for tools to force the secret from the mysterious lock. For an exasperating hour it defied all their efforts, but at last they were successful and it sprang open. Was it empty ? No ; in a recess behind a glass partition lay a piece of folded parchment, on which was written in a small but distinct hand—

‘ Between the tall tree and the patch of sea, exactly as the two-rods-high broken limb points, five rods out and ten feet to the west.’

Jonathan’s countenance fell to absolute blankness.

‘ The tall tree, the sea, and ever so many rods the Lord knows where : how the devil are we to make anything of the utter vagueness of that ? Why, round this coast there are millions of tall trees, and plenty of room between them and the sea to bury all the treasures on earth.’

‘ But there are not many big trees,’ said Grantley quietly, ‘ between the head of the Coorong and the sea. I know about where the Jew left us, if not the exact spot, and you know too, within a very little, where he had got to ; so the treasure, if such there be, must lie between those two points.’

'I can take you,' replied Jonathan, 'to the exact spot where Talco stunned him.'

'Then there is no reason to despair. Let us sail on at once to the top of the lake. That is now to be the scene of our operations, and it is just as well to get away from here, in case the blacks find, after all our trouble, that the grave has been tampered with. I am sure it is an act they would resent.'

'And the only means of revenge left them is to appeal to the police, which would probably result in my being found out,' observed Quig.

'Just so,' answered Grantley—'a consummation awkward for us both.'

They were now merrily scudding along close to the shore, and, as daylight broke, had reached the extreme point of the lake, where they landed and made their camp in expectation of remaining for a few days. Quig was quite familiar with the locality, and pointed out several places where the tribe he lived with had camped on different occasions. After a short refreshing sleep and breakfast, they started off; Jonathan leading to show where he met the Jew. Leaving the lake and keeping back from the sea, he soon came to a spot among some trees where he halted.

'That is the very gum,' he said, 'under which Jacobs was sitting when Talco set on him. There are the mouldering remains of the log—the rest has rotted away. You can see there are plenty of tall trees about here.'

'True,' replied Roland, 'but not patches of sea. To meet that description we must get closer in behind the sandhills. Then again the Jew would never have carried his heavy box so far from where the ship went on shore, though why he wandered on here I cannot think, unless he lost himself. We must go in near the coast sand-hammocks to look for the conditions specified in the parchment. It may be easier than it appears; on the other hand, we may have a good deal of digging to do.'

'Why couldn't the fool have been more explicit?' exclaimed Jonathan.

‘Possibly he did not consider that either wise or necessary,’ said Roland; ‘the description would be ample to refresh his own memory and enable him to identify the place.’

They now began a systematic search, as the squatter suggested. Tree after tree they went to and looked for the glimpse of ocean, but in vain: Quig even climbed several, in some cases getting in this way a view of the sea, but in others not a trace. From one or two a mere streak could be seen, and from another at a considerable elevation ‘a patch.’ Here he was for digging, but Grantley scouted the idea.

‘Why, the Jew could barely climb a steep ladder, man, much less that smooth trunk.’

With a dejected air the climber descended.

‘You are quite right,’ he muttered; ‘I see I must depend upon you, if the treasure is ever to be found.’

After this they gradually worked their way back towards the head of the lake, and found three places worth digging at, if nothing more likely were discovered. Both somewhat tired, and Jonathan greatly discouraged, they returned to their camp to lunch. When that was over Grantley said—

‘We will now begin at the spot where the brig drove on shore, and examine the ground up to where we left off this morning.’

‘I am going to leave it to your judgment entirely,’ replied the other. ‘If you were not with me, I think I should give the matter up in disgust. It’s d——d hard, too, after nearly poisoning myself digging up that stinking black fellow.’

‘I have no doubt we shall succeed yet,’ replied Roland.

‘I wish you would let me try at some of the spots we saw this morning. Wouldn’t it be better than hunting about to no purpose?’

This was uttered in a half-querulous tone.

‘If you are very anxious,’ said Grantley, ‘you can go and try; but I am confident it will be labour lost, as none of the places fully answers the Jew’s description. In two there is no limb projecting in the direction indicated, and in the

other the sea cannot be seen without climbing, which he could not do.'

'But the bough he meant,' argued Quig, 'might have been a small one and have since got broken off.'

'Not at all likely,' retorted the other. 'He had some decided features to write like that about. It is most probable a much bigger tree than any we have yet found, and one from which the sea can be easily viewed.'

'But these confounded sandhills,' urged Jonathan, 'are perpetually changing. In all these years the position may have completely altered and no sea be visible from his tree, even if it answers the description otherwise.'

'In which case we shall be compelled to dig five rods' length, whatever that may mean, on the sea side of every tall tree we come across, which sounds a somewhat stupendous undertaking.'

'Or give up the cursed wild-goose chase altogether,' said Jonathan impatiently.

'You are a cheerfully persistent treasure-hunter to be in company with,' laughed Roland. 'Can't you suggest a few more possible unfortunate contingencies—that the particular tree has been burnt down and utterly destroyed, for instance?'

'I never thought of that to-day, though it often occurred to me years ago,' replied Quig. 'However, I expect that is what has happened, and it's all over with my fortune.'

'Not a bit of it,' said Grantley. 'There will be some remains anyhow, you bet. Keep your pluck up—the game is not played out yet.'

By this time they were round the end of the Coorong opposite the place where the survivors of the *Mary* had landed, and, after going towards the sea some distance, they turned through the sandhills almost in the direction the Jew had taken.

'I am going to put myself in his place,' said Roland, 'and fancy I have a treasure to conceal, in such a manner that I may be able years later to find it.'

He walked on for about ten minutes, and then said—

‘That is the spot I should choose, not far from the big gum-tree there standing in the little flat immediately facing that patch of sea.’

‘By Heaven! the very place, as I am a chicken-hearted fool!’ shouted Jonathan. ‘See, the very broken limb pointing straight to the sea. Hurrah!’

Grantley did not answer, but he was certain this was the spot described in the writing on the parchment in the box found by the side of the dead chief. He was thinking of the day years ago when he rode over this very spot and observed the patch of sea and the broken limb out of which the eagle-hawk had dragged the opossum, though he never dreamt then what was buried beneath.

Jonathan had already stepped out ten paces and begun digging.

‘You’ve found the hiding-place,’ he cried; ‘it’s only fair that I should do the work now.’

He dug fast and fruitlessly, each moment becoming more downcast; finally he threw aside the spade with a bitter curse. Till then Grantley, occupied with his own thoughts, had scarcely noticed what he was doing.

‘The writer of the directions mentions rods, but I don’t suppose he meant surveyor’s measurement, of which he probably knew little or nothing. He says, “Exactly as the two-rods-high broken limb points”—and as the total height of the stem of the tree is not nearly thirty-three feet, it is evident he had something else in his mind. Probably he cut a wand for the purpose of measuring, and refers to that; we can arrive at its length by taking the height of the trunk up to the broken bough. Twelve feet; halve that and we find his rod was six feet long. Now measure five lengths of it, or thirty feet straight out towards the sea; then ten feet at right angles towards the west. So—dig at that spot, and, if there be any truth in Jacobs’ memorandum and dying words, your long-wished-for treasure will be found.’

Grantley had scarcely finished speaking when Jonathan picked up the shovel and was hard at work again. Almost



immediately there was a sound of metal striking metal ; a few more dexterous movements of the implement, and an iron case about eighteen inches square was laid bare. The digger lifted it out of the hole, and, as it had become considerably corroded, he easily broke open the lid, which disclosed to his enraptured view a large number of gold and silver coins. For a few moments he gazed with greedy eyes at so much wealth, and then snatched up a small box from among the gold. The key was still in the lock : he turned it ; the cover flew open, and within lay several dozens of magnificent diamonds and other precious stones.

Some smaller parcels were also found in the case containing jewellery of great value. There were also many articles of a miscellaneous character, giving the idea that they were intended to be broken up, but the Jew had been compelled to leave London too precipitately to allow of this being done.

Roland watched his companion with some amusement, but took no part in unearthing the box or in its subsequent opening. He now spoke—

‘ Well, Jonathan, is it up to expectations, or beyond your wildest dreams ? ’

‘ It ’s good enough for the rest of my days, after dividing fairly with you,’ replied that worthy.

‘ Not one coin or gem shall I touch,’ said Grantley. ‘ I am rich enough already, but, were I poor, I would take none of it.’

‘ Why ? Without your help it would probably have remained buried for ever.’

‘ Don’t ask,’ said Roland, ‘ but understand that I have no part or share in it. Pick it up, and let us go. My compact with you is completed, and I am anxious to be away.’

An hour later they were sailing rapidly down the Coorong before a strong breeze, and the following evening they approached Goolwa.

‘ The boat is mine,’ said Grantley ; ‘ moor her at the upper end of the wharf, and my agent will attend to her. You have plenty of money without breaking into the old coins to last

you to America? If not, say so, and I will supply your requirements.'

'I have abundance,' replied Jonathan, 'but am grateful for your offer. I now again pledge my word, which has never been broken to you at least, that no part of the find shall be touched until I stand in New York city. To-morrow morning I leave for Adelaide, and the ship in which my passage is taken sails two days later.'

As he spoke, the boat glided to the bank, and they both stepped on shore.

'Then here we part,' said Roland.

'Never more to meet,' replied the other; 'anyhow, in Australia. I love you too well, Grantley, to work you ill, if I can help it; and I know that my presence is a continual menace to you.'

'We are better apart,' was the reply. 'You now have the means to make a home for yourself in the great Western land and live quietly and happily there. Farewell.'

Then they shook hands and parted.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### AFTER LONG YEARS

THREE hours later a tall form, wrapped in a long cloak, stood by the window of a cottage at Encounter Bay. There was a light burning in the room, and by it sat a woman sewing. Her figure is slight and graceful, and, as the face is lifted to listen to a sound outside, the watcher sees that it is the face of Petrel, thinner, sadder, but beautiful as ever.

She rose and came to the window, and for a few seconds they looked into each other's eyes—a world of horror and repulsion in hers; then the form outside fled away.

'I could not go without seeing her again,' he muttered—'the best, the only really good and noble woman I have ever known. But for her, I should be a worse man than I am.'

As for Petrel, pale and fainting, she sank back in terror and dismay, glancing round as if she feared she were not alone ; but there was no one to be seen.

‘ His face ! ’ she whispered to herself. ‘ Can it mean any danger to Roland ? I must warn him.’

While in the village, during the evening, she had seen him ride through towards Talkie House. She would hasten there and trust to some happy chance to communicate with him. Hastily wrapping herself in a cloak, she hurried away, her one thought that the man she had so often protected again needed her help. To reach Talkie she had to pass one of their old trysting-places, and there stood the man she sought, buried in thought.

‘ Petrel ! ’ he cried, when he caught sight of her ; ‘ fate, or chance, or whatever brought you here, is more than kind.’

‘ Oh, don’t say that, for I come to warn you of danger. I have to-night seen the man who always brought trouble to you.’

‘ What, Darkie ? Are you not mistaken ? ’

‘ Oh no ! He stood at the window, and I could not fail to recognise him. What does he want here ? Does he mean to betray you ? ’

‘ Petrel, can you not guess ? I am not the only man who cannot leave Australia after a ten years’ absence without looking on your face again.’

And then he told her of his meeting Darkie on the Darling, and their excursion up the Coorong. No doubt, when night fell, he had hastened from Goolwa to see for the last time the face of the woman he too loved. Petrel coloured.

‘ I am sorry,’ she said ; ‘ I have been foolish, and must go home now.’

‘ Not without my warmest thanks,’ said Grantley. ‘ Once more I am indebted to you, when peril seemed near,’ and he took her hand.

‘ I have much to say to you ; can you stay now ? or will you meet me to-morrow ? Oh, Petrel, give me an opportunity

to urge my last request before I, too, leave this country for ever.'

'Let me go,' she answered; 'it is late, and I shall be missed.'

'Not till you promise,' he said firmly. 'Trust me, Petrel, and come. I cannot and will not go without seeing and telling you all.'

The words were so imploring that she could not but relent.

'I will come,' she said; 'I will trust you.'

He would have taken her in his arms, but she eluded him and fled.

Elated, he turned homeward.

'She loves me still,' he thought, and the thought kept recurring even in his dreams that night, long after sleep had fallen upon his weary frame. 'Would she have flown to my assistance the moment she believed my safety was imperilled, were it otherwise? I will take her far away, and by a life's devotion make amends for all the suffering which I have caused her.'

Was a new life indeed dawning for him? or had he yet to learn that for some sins, though there may be repentance, there can be no atonement?

Early next morning Roland, rudely interrupted in the happiest dreams he had known for years, was racing at head-long speed up to the Creek. A messenger had rushed into his room at Talkie and thrust a note into his hand containing these words—

'Joan has been found. Come at once.'

There was no signature, but he knew Maria's writing. Even in his astonishment and haste he did not lose hold of the all-engrossing subject which lately filled his mind, and scribbled a few lines to Petrel, telling how he was called away and claiming her promise for another day. Leaving instructions for its despatch later in the day, he mounted the first horse available and rode off, thinking how rapidly events followed each other. But two nights had passed since the buried treasure was discovered, and now he was scarcely home

when the mystery of his lost sister's fate was solved. Found ! Yes—but how ? Not alive—that could not be, after all these years.

## CHAPTER XXIV

## THE BUSH REVEALS ITS SECRET

FLOSS GIFFORD had arrived at the Creek from the Tatiara late on the night before Grantley returned from the Coorong, and next morning sauntered in to breakfast to find that meal nearly finished. Mrs. Enfield greeted him warmly.

‘ I am sure Rolly will be glad to find you here when he gets back from his shooting excursion,’ she cried.

‘ Since when has he developed so keen a taste for sport of that kind ? I expected to find him quietly resting after roughing it for ten years in the wilds of the interior ! ’

‘ Well, to tell the truth,’ she replied, ‘ I believe it was more to try that grand new gun he has bought, than for any other reason, that he went off. He might just as well go as stay, though, for he is as restless as all you men are ; you never can remain in the house for a day at a time.’

‘ I feel that such a personal reproach,’ said he, ‘ that I won’t go outside the door until——’

‘ The next time,’ interrupted his hostess.

‘ Now you have rendered abortive a good resolution all but completed,’ returned Gifford ; ‘ and if I am found slighting the comforts of your hospitable roof, the sin will be on your own head.’

Floss took a book and settled himself comfortably by the fire. Steadily he read and smoked until the luncheon hour, and even after that break in the monotony of his idleness he made a show of devoting the rest of the day to literature ; but it wouldn’t do. Mrs. Enfield retired for an afternoon nap, and the interesting part of the story was finished. Then came a clatter of hoofs, and a mob of horses galloped into the stock-yard. The book was tossed on one side, and the squatter

put on his hat and walked down to look at them. Enfield was there already.

‘How fat they are!’ said Floss as he drew near. ‘I must have a ride on old Fire-eater—he seems so fit.’

‘It will do him good,’ replied Enfield; ‘he has not had a saddle on him for a month. The brute gets away by himself up the swamp, and is the deuce to find when he is wanted.’

So it came to pass that Gifford went out for a ride from which great results followed.

At first Fire-eater was sportively inclined, and the rider had to pay some attention to his seat; but when he settled down to the sobriety proper to a horse of his age and education, Floss sank into melancholy musing upon the fate of the girl whose memory he still loved and cherished. Full of thoughts of her, he left the road, and, turning into the scrub, wound through its thickest mazes. Out by the black swamp, farther and yet farther he went—scarcely noticing where. Suddenly his horse began floundering in soft mud, and then he awoke to the fact that the animal had made up his mind to cross over, and was already too far and too deeply immersed for it to be safe to attempt turning him round. There was nothing for it but to gain the other side.

To do that required a hard and prolonged struggle, and, once there, Fire-eater had had far too much of it to dream of recrossing.

‘We will go down this side, you old fool,’ said his rider. ‘Though it is a long way round, better that than bog you.’

Turning along the edge of the swamp, he rode on, while his meditations once more recurred to the loss of his love and the subsequent search. He could not help wondering if it had failed by reason of some stupid oversight or blunder. Floss had always believed that, if Roland had been present at the first, when the country was not trodden over by the searchers, she would have been recovered. He possessed so much influence over the blacks that they would have done twice as much for him as for any one else. Then, again, Roland was

MURRAY  
RIVER



PHOTO: S. A. GOVT.





unsurpassed in bushcraft, and would have guarded against any error, or waste of time, in beating the country.

‘There must have been blundering, or nothing could have been hid from us,’ he muttered. ‘Will the secret ever be revealed?’

The underwood here grew very thick, with much higher groves of scrub-eucalyptus growing close together. The swamp itself was covered with ti-tree and a lower growth of cane and flag, so thick that it was impervious to the rays of the sun, and almost to the light of day. As he rode along, Floss’s head was frequently high enough for him to see up the densely clothed slopes of the low hills that rose from the morass, though on foot he could have seen but a few yards, and often only a few feet, in front of him.

Forcing his way through the tangled foliage, he came to a small open space nearly surrounded by the ti-tree, with a thick clump of gum scrub at the back. As he entered the clear spot, he noticed some bones lying near the edge of the swamp—the remains of a sheep dead years ago, no doubt, he said to himself. Then he noticed something white in the grove of bushes. Perhaps it was another dead sheep. Surely, however, there was something peculiar in the way those sticks stood, leaning towards each other among the gum-bush stems. Dismounting, he tied Fire-eater to a sapling and entered the thicket. Yes, it was undoubtedly an old wurley, and the object bleached to whiteness a bone. His heart sank within him. There, through the hanging twigs and leaves, a grinning skull confronted him—human without a doubt, for there were the two rows of teeth and the eyeless sockets set in the flat and bony framework of the human face. Startled, and nearly unmanned by a great dread, he tore the branches away, and before him lay the bones of some poor creature.

The skeleton was not perfect—many of the bones were broken and others gone; but still enough was left to show that man or woman had yielded up life in that lonely spot. Perhaps it had been carried there after death? No, the old camp was evidence that the last miserable shelter had been

found beneath it. Well might he gaze again ! Those slender, fragile bones were never covered with the flesh and sinews of manhood—no ! nor of age either ; it was the youth and beauty of girlhood that had clothed them.

‘Joan Grantley!’ he gasped. ‘My God, if it should be so!’

He dropped to his knees, covering his face in awe and grief. When he raised his eyes again, he saw a hollow round log about two feet long lying by the right-hand side of the skeleton, and in its cavity—what ? Forgetting all else, he turned it up, and out dropped a book—Joan’s prayer-book, warped, yellow with exposure and age, but legible. It had been wonderfully preserved in the narrow receptacle into which the dying hand had thrust it. Opening it, in the fly-leaf he read the following lines :—

‘DARLING SISTER,—Floss left me at the gate, and I waited there to hear him ride off ; then I went to where he asked me to be his wife. I was so happy I wanted to see the place again. I couldn’t find it ; and then I saw the light at the house ; but the farther I walked towards it, the farther it seemed away. Then it disappeared altogether, and I knew I was lost. I ran on and on, calling and screaming until I burst a blood-vessel and could not even speak any more. I fell down, and then the dreadful wild dogs came howling about me, and I saw their horrible eyes glaring at me all round. I must have fainted, for I remembered nothing more till morning. Too weak to move, I thought some one would be sure to find me ; but when no one came, I tried to make a hut, as the blacks do, to keep the wild dogs from me. At dark a poor sheep came racing past, chased by them, and they caught and killed it quite near me. Oh, it was awful ! I thought they would tear me to pieces and kill me in the same way. I lay and watched them all night.

To-day I heard dear Floss coo-ee, but I could not answer or move. Shall I ever be found ?—come soon, some one, or it will be—too—late. Oh, those fearful dogs, will they wait till—I—am—dead ? Roland would—have—found me. Oh, I surely cannot live to pass such another night. Good-bye—sister——Is—this—death ? Thank—God !’

There the pathetic memorial of the lost girl ended, and her lover bowed his head in his hands and wept in a passion of sorrow and remorse. They had indeed blundered, like the

veriest novices in bushcraft. Why, if they had simply spread themselves a few feet apart, and gone round and round the station in an ever-widening circle, they must have found her. Yes, she was right. If Roland had been there at the first, she would certainly have been saved. His heart was full of self-reproach and bitterness as he thought of how he himself had failed her in the hour of her direst need. Not now did he think of his own name cleared from the foul suspicion that had rested upon it all these long years, but he knew he must go and tell others what he had seen. He took no thought of time. Darkness had long set in before he reached the Creek station gate. Throwing the rein over a post, he strode in a dazed manner towards the house. Enfield heard him ride up, and, wondering at his prolonged absence, he hastened to meet him, leaving Maria standing in the light from the open door on the verandah.

‘My God, Floss, what is the matter?’ he ejaculated, for he had caught a glimpse of the pale, working face.

‘Come with me,’ said the other, as he turned away from the sister waiting there, who intuitively knew, in some mysterious way, that something extraordinary had happened. ‘I have found her, all that is left of her, by the Black Swamp. She tells her own tale, written in her prayer-book here. Take it and tell your wife; I cannot, without dying of shame’; and he staggered off.

Enfield followed him. ‘Floss,’ he said, and there was a stern, commanding ring in his voice, ‘there must be no folly now; you will be wanted, and I must know where to find you—it is due to yourself and to us.’

‘I know,’ he replied; ‘I will be near when you call. Now go and tell her.’

There was indeed grief in the station household that night, and many were the tears shed by her sister over the last piteous farewell words of the dying girl, written as her life ebbed away.

Enfield had heard that afternoon of Grantley having gone on from Goolwa to Talkie, and, when the first excitement was

over, he immediately despatched a messenger to him on Fire-eater, much to that injured quadruped's disgust. Nor was his sense of wrong the less, when Roland, no other horse being available at the moment, sprang on his back and rode him at headlong speed back to the Creek again.

'Here's a pretty fuss about a parcel of old bones!' we may well suppose was the soliloquy of the panting steed as, at length freed from saddle and bridle, he walked dejectedly away.

Two hours later Gifford led Roland and Enfield to the spot where the remains of the long missing girl lay. Casting a glance round, Grantley instantly recognised it as the very place to which he had followed the flight of the stooping eagle-hawk. There had, then, been something more to attract the voracious Australian scavenger than he supposed when he saw the carcass of the half-devoured sheep. Had he but looked more closely, what a world of wearing anxiety might have been spared! Certainly, however, he was too late to save the life which, her own words proved, must have mercifully fled many hours previously. None the less he reproached himself that the mere accident of a sheep having been killed on the same spot could have sufficed to mislead his bush-knowledge so completely. A child or a 'new chum' could not have been more easily deceived or led astray. He was bitterly ashamed of the part he had played in the whole matter.

It was inexplicable, too, that the blacks had proved so useless; but, as a matter of fact, when the heavy rain that fell and the flocks of sheep passing over the tracks rendered following them an impossibility, their interest in the matter had ceased. Then the entire absence of any trace soon excited their superstition and fear of the malignant spirit 'Muldarpie,' to whom they ever ascribed all mysterious evil.

Gravely the three men stood by the old camp and meditated on the strangely pathetic ending of a being whom they all had loved. Silently they collected these poor weather-worn remains and covered up that mutely protesting featureless face. These having been put reverently aside, they carefully searched the ground where she had lain, and found the ring

that her lover had put on her finger when she consented to be his wife, and a plain gold brooch she always wore.

Mournfully they left the melancholy place and returned home, bearing the last relics of the lost sister and affianced bride. There never was a sadder cortège, as there never had been or could be a sadder end, in all the annals of Australia ; and these are deeply tinged by the tragic fate of numbers of her children.

War, with its perils and its glories, has had little part in the making of Australia ; but, when that page of history comes to be written with true and impartial pen, it must record, in simple justice to the pioneer band who first shaped her destiny, that they faced privation, danger, and death with a heroism and constancy never surpassed by those who had fallen in battle, sword in hand. Among them were not only strong and steadfast men to lead them on, but fragile, gently nurtured women to encourage and sustain them. All honour to the pioneers who dared and did so much, for never have so few done more in all the brilliant annals of British colonisation.

## CHAPTER XXV

### NEMESIS

THE discovery of the remains of the long-lost girl under such extraordinary and pathetic circumstances excited intense interest in the quiet neighbourhood. For far more than the proverbial nine days it was the one absorbing topic of conversation ; then it passed from men's minds and women's too, replaced by some newer and therefore more engrossing event. For a while it compelled Roland to abandon his designs with regard to Petrel. He felt that he would injure his chance of success by prematurely urging his project upon her after the unravelling of his sister's tragic fate.

Meantime, Aunt Arabella's departure was at hand, her passage having already been taken. Perhaps it would be

better that she should be beyond the possibility of interference before he moved in the matter ; for he well knew that, if she suspected anything of the design he entertained, she would strain every nerve to frustrate it. Further letters had arrived from Elinor Grantley pressing her aunt to join her in her now lonely home, and the same communication expressed a maidenly hope that her cousin, Sir Roland, was well, and that he might soon take possession of his estates.

‘ I sincerely hope so,’ he observed when his aunt read out the message ; but nothing more would he divulge, and finally she was obliged to desist from her inquiries.

Then came the hour for her departure, and, with a well-acted assumption of certainty that he would soon follow her to England, Miss Grantley, shedding copious tears, was driven rapidly away in Enfield’s buggy.

Her dutiful nephew felt immensely relieved by her departure, and all now appeared favourable to his plans. He had privately received satisfactory offers for his stations, which he intended to accept. In any case he determined to leave the country for ever, with or without Petrel ; but of late he had begun to believe he should prevail upon her to accompany him. With the absence of his evil genius—for so he considered his aunt—hope grew almost into a certainty. He still put a stern restraint on himself ; he did not act precipitately, and nearly a fortnight elapsed before he attempted to meet the woman on whom all his thoughts and hopes were centred. Night after night he had strolled out to visit the old places where they used to meet : past the deserted Fishery ; round the sea-coast ; up to the summit of the Bluff, hoary with age and tempest-torn—all speaking to him of her, the one mate in the wide world for him. His passion seemed to feed upon each familiar object they two had known so intimately. It grew stronger and more absorbing day by day, till sleep forsook him and he rarely sought his bed before morning. At last, when he could bear the suspense no longer, they met one evening at the rock where he had first told her of his love.

She sat in the old seat, and he, bending over her, gazed

into her eyes, beautiful as when they first beamed upon him, for some trace of the great love that once glowed in them ; but his heart fell, for he saw there only resignation.

‘ Petrel, I have longed to see you. At last we meet, and upon this interview depends the future of your life and mine. You are a wife, but I beg that you will not shrink from me when I tell you that I love you more deeply, sincerely, and passionately than ever ; for I am not going to urge you madly and impetuously, as of old, but shall endeavour to appeal calmly, not alone to your love, but to your reason. The consciousness that I am pleading with you for the last time for my only hope of happiness, like a gambler playing his final stake, may well teach my tongue eloquence.’

Her pale face became paler still, but she answered never a word.

‘ Do you know,’ he continued, ‘ that my uncle in England is dead, and that I have succeeded to his title and property ? ’

‘ Yes ; you will go and enjoy it,’ came in low tones from the bent head.

‘ That depends upon you,’ he answered. ‘ Through my own infernal pride I gave you up for rank and riches, and when, without you, I have ceased to value them, both have come to me. Who am I that I should have visited not the sins but the unmerited misfortunes of the noble father upon the innocent child ? I am stained with crime as he never was, and but for you, his daughter, might have ignominiously given up my life on the scaffold, or be now languishing in a prison. To you I owe my life twice over, my honour, liberty, and years of hospitable care. Did ever man owe woman so much and do so little in return ? My God, what indeed have I attempted in repayment of such a weight of obligation ! Nothing—ay, worse than nothing ! You, angel that you are, may forgive me, but I can never forgive myself.’

In uncontrollable agitation he leaned his head on his folded arms upon the rock. She rose and whispered—

‘ O Roland, dear Roland, forget it all ; there is nothing to forgive. It is all past and done with.’

He would have clasped her to his heart, but as he raised himself she sank into her seat. For a moment he hesitated, then forced himself to be calm.

‘No,’ he said, ‘the account between us is still unsettled ; I owe you everything. Add to this that I am a lonely and unhappy man, who, unless you listen to me, will go forth a wanderer on the face of the earth, hoping the end may soon come. You are the loveless and unloving wife of an unfaithful husband. Why should your life, why should mine, be blighted ? Leave him, sue for a divorce, and it shall be so arranged that he will not oppose it. More than that, no trouble or publicity that the skill and care of the ablest of men can spare you shall fall upon you. The day that you are free I will make you my honoured wife and set you high among the matrons of England, of whom none can be more pure and worthy. You are childless and kinless, and, except for one intolerable bond, without a tie. Break this bond and come to me—my darling, come !’

There was a world of appeal and entreaty in the concluding words. For a second she swayed, as if she were about to fall into his arms ; then she murmured—

‘It must not be. Oh, Roland, tempt me no more. In the bygone days you tempted me beyond my strength, and, if I had not taken upon me those sacred marriage-vows, alas ! what should I have become ! I cannot forget that to my husband I at least owe it that he saved me then.’

‘Saved you from a life of love for a loveless wedded existence !’ he exclaimed with a laugh ; and words cannot express the concentrated bitterness of his tones. ‘So to the saviour you owe more than to the tempter !’

‘Oh, speak not thus, Roland, my Roland ! What I owe to you is more than mortal can know. I would not surrender the sweet consciousness of having been loved by you for all that earth can bestow.’

‘And yet you can bear to let me go !’

‘And yet I can bear to let you go,’ she repeated in low and mournful tones, ‘because it is right, and my duty is here by the



side of the man to whom I have sworn to be true till death us do part.'

'And who thinks so lightly of those vows that he is willing to set you free.'

'He cannot set me free. When I stood before God's altar, I took the most solemn oath, that can be abrogated only by death. Nor does marriage mean a mere passive acquiescence in things as they are; my husband has a right to my care and service.'

'Petrel,' impetuously interrupted Grantley, 'you know this is but a vain wasting of your happiness; you know that he will sink lower and lower until he drops into a drunkard's grave.'

'With my help, perhaps not—without it, yes; hence the greater would be my sin in leaving him. His soul is committed to my keeping. Roland, dear friend, cannot you understand that my duty is here where you first found me? My past life and training have not fitted me to be your mate among the proud ladies of England. Maybe I could not be happy in so exalted a station, and then you would soon weary of me. You are too noble to show it, but, if I only fancied it, it would kill me. Leave me where God has placed me. Go, take the position that is yours, marry the woman who awaits your coming, and forget that Petrel Cleeve ever crossed your path.'

Weeping silently, she bowed her head upon her hands. Deeply moved, Roland sank beside her, saying—

'When I forget you, I shall be dead or mad. No precept or principle, however sacred, weighs one feather's weight against my love for you. Will nothing move you? I might plead—I do plead—my long-enduring love, my deep repentance. Obdurate woman, have you placed yourself on so high a pedestal of purity that you have no *pity* left, since I appeal in vain to your love?'

She shrank and shivered at the harsh and cruel words.

'Oh, you are cruel, Roland! Dear Roland, do not speak to me so hardly!'

In a tumult of passion and remorse he snatched her to him and strained her to his breast, covering her face with kisses. For a while she lay, as if she had found her fitting resting-place. At length she said—

‘Let me go home,’ and he knew that he had failed, though with the tenacity of his nature he would not admit it.

‘Not yet will I accept your final answer. Remember that, without you to share them, title and estate will never be claimed by me. My benefactress in the past, can you wreck my future?’

There was a long pause before the reply came—

‘I desire to make your future bright and happy, not to wreck it. Without me your course is clear; with me it is beset with difficulties.’

‘Listen, Petrel. I hoped that what I am going to tell you need not have been spoken, but I will leave no chance untried to win you. The man to whom you are bound offers to release you on the sole condition that a provision is made sufficient for his wants. He is indeed base enough to take a price for the rights he has already forfeited by his own acts. On that condition he agrees not to defend an action for divorce, and will set you free.’

Her glorious eyes flashed.

‘Roland Grantley, are you so lost to all sense of honour as to dream of bargaining thus for the woman you profess to esteem and love? Away, and leave me!’

‘The ignominy is not mine, but his,’ he cried. ‘To gain you I am willing to surrender half of my fortune, or more if it be necessary, to the man I have most cause to hate of all men on earth. Leave such a reptile, who dishonours you by his touch, and come to the man who will respect your virtues, revere your character, and lavish such a love upon you as shall make your life a dream of bliss.’

They had been walking back as he poured forth these last protestations and entreaties, and he felt that his time was short.

‘Will you come?’ he continued, with his soul in his eyes.

'O my darling, the whole future is bright before us and a life of joy and peace awaits us. You are mine, are you not?—mine at last!'

'Roland, you deceive yourself. It can never be. For God's sake, tempt me no more. I am a wife, and should be sacred to you. Say farewell here.'

He staggered at the fixed resolve that was manifest in her words, and his head sank despairingly upon his breast. She kissed his brow, and, when he raised his head, he was alone—alone henceforth for ever.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### THE DEATH OF THE STAR

THE sun has sunk to rest behind the clear outline of the Mount MacPherson Range. It is a summer evening, calm as the close of day so often is on the banks of the great river that waters so vast an area of Central Australia. From the hollow limbs of the mighty trees that fringe its banks and rear their stately heads from its rich flooded bends, begin to sound the almost human cries of the owls, intermingled with the discordant screams of the numerous other night-birds which keep up the weird nocturnal chorus.

Paying small regard to these voices of the night, a strange group walk slowly along near the course of the great stream, a short distance from Moolahalla station.

In the midst strides with the same proud step the grand old horse that has figured so prominently in these pages, the star on his forehead glistening white in the gloaming. Beside him, with one hand resting affectionately on his neck, is his master, on whose stern face a deeper and more hopeless grief than ever is indelibly graven. There is evidence, too, that a bitter conflict is going on at present in those worn features and sunken eyes, from which every trace of joy appears to have finally fled.

It is a wondering group of aborigines who surround him. Old men and young, women, children, and girls are there—come to see they know not exactly what, but something which is to precede the departure for ever of the master they had learned to love as much as the dependant and slave can ever love his lord. Both horse and owner are possessed of attributes that have long since extorted the admiration of the simple savage people, even as heroic qualities never fail to receive the adulation of the more civilised. The men pace on with sombre looks and murmur to themselves, as if in protest against a deed which they begin dimly to understand is contemplated, but can scarcely believe possible. The women, as the master's purpose dawns upon them, are more demonstrative, and, between their scolding of their children and screams to each other, an occasional wail breaks forth for the 'balara yarraman' (good horse). There is one remarkable girlish figure walking just behind Grantley, near the Star. It is Miola, audibly weeping. She has early fathomed his design, and knows well why the master has told them to accompany him; knows too, that the friend and protector of her race will, before another sun rises, have turned his back upon them never to return. What marvel that she wept? He had never been other than kind to her—nay, more than that, even gentle and considerate, treating her rather as a friend than a servant, and recognising her intelligence and faithful services as they deserved. He had already told them that the station was sold and that a stranger would take his place. To a few any change had at least the charm of novelty, but the majority felt unfeigned sorrow at the loss of the great white master.

For himself, though absorbed in the wreck of the hopes he had built up until they grew in his mind to a certainty, still, now that the time had come to part from his dependants, he could not but realise that there was yet left in him a capacity for feeling.

Slowly wending onwards, they came to a grove of trees, box, gum, and acacia, growing thick and luxuriant. Lying

among them was much dried timber. Here they halted, and Grantley spoke in low, tremulous tones, telling them why he had brought them there. 'He was going far away, never to see them more, and strangers would occupy his place in all things. His cattle, sheep, and horses were all theirs, save one only—the Star. He was now growing old, and his master could not bear to think that, when he had gone, the fine old horse might be ridden too hard and perhaps abused, or, worse still, that when worn out and helpless he would be left at last to die a lingering death of torture, a prey to ants, flies, and other vile insects, in the back-country. To guard against this, he was now going to shoot him and make a big fire to burn his body.'

A silence, almost a stupor, fell upon the listeners. Then an old man spoke in wondering surprise and strong condemnation, and others after him took up the strain and pleaded for the Star, as if he were one of their own kin.

Calmly Grantley stood, his hand caressing the proud head bent to his touch, but there was no yielding in the stern, set face. Presently he raised his arm with the old gesture of command, and in a few brief words signified that what he had determined upon must be done. Too long accustomed to submit to his imperative manner to demur now, they sank into silent acquiescence. He took a revolver from his belt.

'Farewell, best and truest dumb friend that ever man had,' he whispered, as he bent down to kiss the gleaming star; and the next moment a report rang out in the stillness of the night and the Star sank dead at his master's feet with a bullet in the centre of his forehead.

The impressionable witnesses of the deed burst into a loud lament, and thus was the requiem of the good horse sung. Then the wood was piled about him and the fire applied, and in a few hours all that remained of one of the noblest steeds that even Australia has produced were a few charred bones.

\* \* \* \* \*

Many years have passed away, yet Grantley Hall still stands empty, and bride, title, and estate still wait to be

claimed by the heir : but nought is known of Roland Grantley. A vague rumour floated across the seas that he had been seen leading a fierce band of Red Indians of the Far West of America in their last desperate struggle against their white oppressors ; but, if so, his body was not found among the heaps of slain.

At a later time it was confidently asserted that he bore a part, under an assumed name, with Garibaldi's ' Redshirts ' in their glorious fight for Italian independence, and poured out his life-blood on one of the famous battle-fields towards the close of the strife ; but of proof there was none.

His aunt, though weary with waiting, will believe none of these tales, and says that she will not die until the heir of the Grantleys takes his place in his ancestral halls. As for his cousin, she still hopes on, though youth is passing away and her dream of love and happiness with it.

THE END









UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

Los Angeles

This book is DUE on the last date stamped below.

4-20-81 ILL  
JPR 8:30

3 1158 00653 4894

FR  
51  
74

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY  
AA 000 374 348 1

